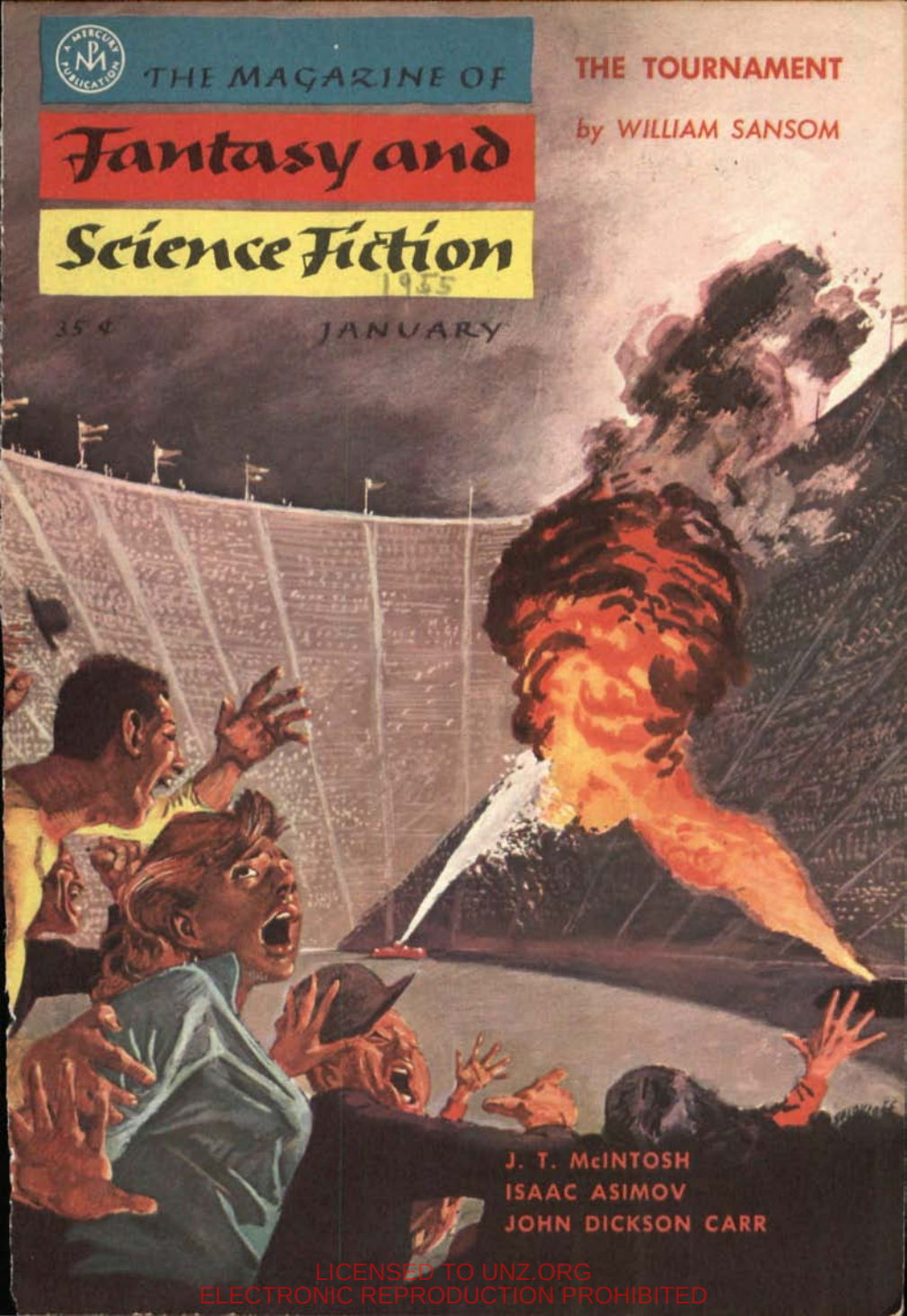

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Science Fiction Marches On . . .

The rising popularity of science fiction among the cultural leaders of the nation, as well as among the people at large, is ample testimony of its vitality and maturity. Engineers, physicians, chemists, statesmen, educators – they have all found pleasure and enlightenment in science fiction.

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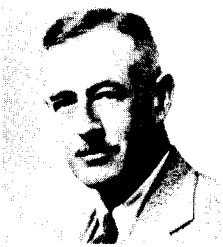

"I am . . . convinced that science fiction, in spite of the vast amount of silly and clumsy writing the genre has spawned, is deserving of the serious attention it is only now beginning to receive. . . . It is at once a literature of escape and one deeply and earnestly concerned with mankind's present plight and its problematical future."

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 8, No. 1 JANUARY

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"To the stars!" we cry in our most ringing tones; and even the antique Romans used the journey to the stars as the symbol of reaching glory over harsh ways — per aspera ad astra. *But* ad astra *may also mean* ad aspera; *the harsh hardships of interstellar colonization may be such that "To the stars!" is no cry of triumph, but a remorseless sentence of doom. . . .*

Selection

by J. T. MCINTOSH

I

LEW pushed open the swing door of the club and dropped in the nearest empty, shadowy corner. He kept his hat and coat on, with his hat tilted so that his face was in shadow.

He wasn't hiding from anybody — he was hiding from everybody.

Later he would seek Hy — neat, cute, tiny, sympathetic Hy — and later still some of his friends, the Kays and the Merediths and Joe Robertson. But it was too soon yet to seek anybody.

He had called one person on the phone — his mother. All he had told her was the bare fact of his Selection. Then he had hung up and left her to get used to the idea, as he was trying to get used to it.

The club was a sort of indoor wood-and-glass maze, with head-high partitions at right angles this way and that, forming innumerable shady corners for lovers, businessmen and more honest crooks to discuss their intimate affairs. Few people sat there alone. There was curiosity in the voice of the waitress who took his order, straight rye, and she dipped and bent slightly, involuntarily, to see if she could see anything under the rim of his hat. She saw the tip of a long nose and a small, fair mustache, that was all.

Left with his drink, Lew stared as if he had bought it merely to look at it. Perhaps he had; it seemed to him, now that he had a drink in front of him, that getting drunk was too obvious an answer to the challenge of a lifetime . . . in fact, no answer at all.

It was starkly incredible that Selection should happen to him. True, it happened to seven per cent of the population — seven in every hundred people born were Selected at some period in their lives. But he had always taken that to mean complete exemption for him.

For he was lucky.

Lew Stevenson had always been

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lucky. He wouldn't be one of seven unfortunate people out of a hundred, or one of fifty or even ninety unfortunate people out of a hundred. If ten were all right, safe, lucky, *he* would be one of the ten. Always.

Now that same Lew Stevenson was told he was Selected.

It was something he had never feared, any more than he had feared death, illness, pain or disfigurement. These were all things which wouldn't happen to him — expect death, of course, far, far in the future, when he had done all he wanted to do.

He could hardly believe he had been Selected, but he had to believe it. Selection was final, inescapable, and there were no mistakes. The POs were careful, sober and not unsympathetic. After every ballot — there was one a month, though it was only every year or so that the Selection ballots impinged on most people, when they heard of some close friend or relative being Selected — the POs made it their business to identify without possibility of error every man or woman who had been Selected, learn a little about him and only then break the news to him, quite kindly but irrevocably.

Lew sat and tried to think of all the times he had been lucky. But there were too many of them. Everything had always turned out right for him. He had had narrow escapes galore, he had guessed right on hundreds of occasions, he had . . .

"Are you all right, mister?" asked the waitress anxiously.

A sudden resentful desire to shock her made him snap back at her, "Would you be all right if you'd just been Selected?"

It didn't have quite the effect he intended. The waitress merely said, "Bad luck, mister," hovered sympathetically for a moment, and then left him to it. He got the impression that someone very close to her had once been Selected too. Husband, brother, friend . . . or perhaps she was merely used to people coming in and asking her how she would feel if she'd just been Selected.

Bad luck, mister. How could anyone ever say that to him? It almost seemed that they were gloating because his luck had let him down at last.

He stood up abruptly, tossing the rye over as if he hated it but had to get it down somehow. He didn't want it any more, yet it seemed silly to come into a saloon, order a drink and go out leaving it untouched.

As quickly and quietly as he had come in he went out again. The door swung gently, silently behind him and stopped, as if nothing had passed through but a gust of air. He had almost ceased having any effect on Earth already, he thought.

As the chill evening air slapped him on the face he had a change of heart.

This was just the supreme test. This was going to be the narrowest escape of all time.

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In the morning the POs would be back to tell him apologetically: "Sorry, Mr. Stevenson. There's been a mistake. It hardly ever happens — I could almost say it *never* happens — but . . ." And he would have another story to tell, the most astonishing of all, the story of how he had been Selected — and reprieved.

It didn't happen, they said, but there had to be a first time for everything.

On second thoughts — no.

No. He wasn't going to deceive himself that way. Everybody wanted to believe that his Selection had been a mistake, everybody deluded himself into thinking every ring of every bell meant reprieve. And nobody ever was reprieved.

He would accept it. He'd been Selected. No arguments.

At that he hadn't as much cause for complaint as some people had.

The only exemptions from Selection were children under ten. That meant that quite a few people were Selected who had the best reasons in the world for appealing against it — and there was no appeal.

In the past there had been appeal, and whole classes of exemptions. But for two main reasons both appeal and exemption had been stopped. One was the complaints, sometimes with justice, of string-pulling — the fact that appeal was at least a chance for those with money to buy their way out of Selection by exploitation of every possible legal loophole. The other was that Selection was a method of dealing with over-population, and the easiest and surest way of getting exemption was to get married and have a lot of children. So Selection plus exemption was defeating its own ends.

Now there was no exemption and no appeal, and eleven-year-old children, great-grandmothers, young husbands and mothers of six were Selected and that was that. Of course it was cruel, evil and against all the principles of civilization and humanity. But if humanity would persist in overpopulating its home world, something had to be done with the surplus. And on the whole it was fairer to go by lot than anything else.

Lew wasn't married, didn't support his mother, and might be said to have no kick at all against Selection . . . if anyone could be said to have no kick against Selection.

Telling himself that, and other things, he decided he was ready once more to meet people he knew and accept any sympathy they were prepared to offer.

He went to the Kays first, not Hy, because they were nearer. They were at home. They were usually at home, because they were very much in love and only rarely felt the urge to share each other's company with other people. They were good-natured and not very interesting. Mary spent most of her time in company trying to mend matters after Jack had put his foot in them.

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"What's the matter, Lew?" asked Jack. "You look as if you'd found a penny and lost a dollar."

"I've lost more than a dollar," said Lew. "I've just been Selected."

Mary gave a stifled shriek and fainted.

Jack dropped beside her on the carpet, casting a furious glance up at Lew. "For heaven's sake, Lew, use your nut," he said angrily. "You know how Mary has always —"

"But it's true!" Lew exclaimed.

"I don't give a damn, you should know better than to frighten her like that. She —"

Mary stirred and Jack devoted his whole attention to her.

Lew stared down at them. These were his friends, as good-natured and sympathetic as anyone he knew, and he knew they would be concerned on his account once they realized what had happened. But so far Jack realized only that Lew had said something which had made Mary faint, and Mary . . .

He knew, when he thought about it, why she had dropped like that. Mary lived in perpetual dread that Jack would come in one day and say that very thing. Lew had been quite well aware of that, but his own Selection had wiped the hopes and fears of others completely from his mind.

He decided not to stay. He didn't feel disappointed or vexed or angry. He didn't feel anything in particular. Quietly and without haste he went out without glancing back at Jack and Mary, who was still on the floor.

It was Hy who mattered, only Hy. He should have gone to her, only her.

There was a reason why he hadn't. He was afraid. Stepping into a doorway to light a cigarette he admitted his fear to himself, his reluctance to go and see Hy.

She might not go with him.

He tried to brush the thought aside. He and Hy weren't actually engaged, but they had a clear understanding. Once their futures were a little more settled, they would get married. Meantime he was having to eke out his stage, film and TV set-designing work with commercial art, which he hated, and she was in cabaret, which she hated even to admit.

Now, of course, they would get married right away so that they would be able to go together, and somehow they would manage to be happy, even though they would never see Earth again.

If Hy came with him, that was. The thought kept returning that she might not. There was also the thought that he shouldn't even ask her to go with him.

But that was a ridiculous idea, not even asking her — like some of the wildly quixotic things in movies.

He refused to think about it any more. Everything would be all right. Everything was *always* all right. He hailed a taxi.

Hy was dancing at The Fruit

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Bowl, waiting for a half-promised part in a big show. She had fought and won a battle of prestige and had a dressing room to herself. Lew had heard all about, but was lost in, the tiny shades of difference and distinction in the battle. Hy had a small solo spot, he knew that, but she also had to dance in the line with seven other girls. There had been mention of a purple costume. The main point about the costume was that the other girls were in green. At any rate, Hy hadn't won that point. No purple. She could pretend she was a star if she liked, and she did like. She wasn't. She was merely, like most show people most of the time, waiting for something better.

Lew knew his way about. He tapped on the door of Hy's room, and when there was no answer, went in. It was a tiny, airless room, heady with perfume, powder, grease paint and the lingering tang of Hy's Egyptian cigarettes. Without Hy in it it was like a small, untidy pile of vivid summer clothes waiting rather forlornly on a beach for their glamorous owner to return.

Lew drew out his pack of cigarettes to explore it with his fingers, but it was every bit as empty as he suspected. He searched around for some of Hy's. He didn't like Egyptian cigarettes, but they were better than not smoking at all.

The door swung open and shut, and Hy was with him.

"Well, I'm sorry it had to come to this," she said mildly.

He turned, almost startled. Then he realized how it must look to her, coming in and finding him rummaging through her dressing-table drawers. He laughed.

"Sorry, Hy," he said. "But I'm dying for a smoke, and I'm fresh out of cigarettes."

Slowly she smiled, and the room was transformed.

Hy Hendon was a showgirl because she had the natural equipment for it, and she had smiled as an amateur for sixteen years and as a professional for six. But this wasn't her professional smile, it was her real smile, which was a thousand times better, perhaps merely because she wasn't paid for it. When she came in wearing her brief green costume and smiled, she turned the too-authentic backstage setting into a scene in a 3-D musical, and Lew felt, as always, that he had to act as romantically and adolescently as a 3-D musical hero while he was with her.

He reached out his arms for her, and into his right hand she deftly slipped an oval cigarette. He grinned and lit it.

"I know I said I was dying for a smoke," he admitted, his eyes catching and holding hers, "but there are things I want more. Such as —"

"Straight across and left at the door marked 'Private,'" she told him.

He grinned again, but protested. "It's too late to treat me as you treat . . . other wolves. Surely I'm in a special position, Hy?"

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"You should know. I thought it was just the way you stood."

Permitting no more backchat, he caught her arm firmly, sat down and pulled her onto his knee. For a moment she submitted, even letting him kiss her despite the danger of damage to her makeup. But soon she freed herself and jumped up.

"Not in the middle of a show," she said firmly. "Well, I know this isn't a show, but it comes to the same thing. Afterwards is different."

He moved quickly, but she moved even more quickly. "Let me change first, anyway," she said, weakening. "Then we won't have to keep watching the clock. *That* way, please."

She turned his shoulders firmly so that he was looking at a discolored wall. Behind him there were intriguing rustles.

"All right," she said after an astonishingly short time, and he turned. She was posing, almost unconsciously, waiting for the acknowledgment that was her due, and that had to keep on being her due.

"Hy," said Lew, almost desperately, feeling things were slipping from his grasp, "Hy, something's happened."

She stopped posing. "What's happened?" she asked.

"I've been Selected," he said bluntly.

She stared at him without change of expression for two seconds. Then she burst into tears.

Hy was a hundred pounds exactly and five feet exactly. When she cried it seemed almost inevitable that she should be cuddled and comforted like a child, though that was the only time anyone ever treated her as a child. So Lew, who wanted to be comforted, did the comforting.

Suddenly she said, "I must go, Lew," tore herself from his arms and darted out.

He knew she couldn't be due on the floor so soon. She had run away from him — to cry again? To think?

For the first time he faced fully and squarely the reason for his reluctance to come and see Hy, the reason for his fear.

People who were Selected had to go. People who weren't didn't, no matter how close they were to people who had been Selected. If a husband was Selected, the wife was free, automatically. She wasn't considered a divorcée, she was considered a widow.

And Lew wasn't even engaged to Hy.

There were cases — really quite a lot of them — in which husbands and wives, mothers and daughters, brothers and sisters, cousins, even just close friends, elected to stay together, and since one had to go, the other went too.

There were a good many cases like that, and actually more of them were engaged couples than married couples. For engaged couples were in love, love at its least reasonable and most demonstrative stage. Thousands of young women declared passionately that Selection made no

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difference. And thousands of young men said there was only one girl in the galaxy for them, and that wherever in the galaxy she was, there they had to be.

Married couples generally looked at the thing more soberly. If their feeling for each other had cooled, Selection was a way out. Even if they still loved each other, there were things to be considered. Things like children and regret and time to make sure.

Children under ten couldn't go. Few parents would take them even if they were over ten. So if there were children, and one parent was Selected, the other stayed. The governments of the world made sympathetic arrangements for the children of Selected parents, but it wasn't the same.

Regret could ruin a marriage, and wise couples considered that. It was all very well to make a noble gesture, to follow the spirit of the marriage vows and not the mere legal obligations, and go wherever one's husband or wife had to go. But later, if there were regrets, it would be too late to change one's mind. It was better for a marriage to be broken, leaving happy memories, than dissolved into regret, recrimination and finally hate.

It wasn't possible to change your mind one way, but you could the other. If you went, that was that. You couldn't come back. However, if you didn't go at once, you could always volunteer later.

Lew had hoped, and still hoped, that Hy was going to go with him.

But as he sat in the overcrowded, tinsel-bright little dressing room behind a night club and waited, he admitted that it was a lot to ask of any girl. A tremendous amount to ask.

He sat there waiting, trying not to think, for what might have been minutes or hours.

At last the door opened again, and Hy was with him. But as soon as he looked up at her he saw that that was purely temporary.

She didn't have to say much. "I'm sorry, Lew. Really sorry. I can't go with you. That's what you were going to ask, isn't it?"

He nodded, trying not to show the bitter disappointment of it.

"I've thought it out," she said, her eyes steady on his, "and I can't do it. I won't make excuses. I'm just not big enough, that's all."

He tried to force himself to use that as an opening for cracks about her five feet and her hundred pounds and not being big enough . . . but he couldn't quite make it. His throat and chest were choked and he was afraid that if he spoke his voice would quaver and break.

"There's no doubt at all, I suppose?" she went on, forcing herself to speak, since Lew didn't. "No, there wouldn't be. There never is. You have to go, Lew, and it's hurting me to think of it, but . . ."

She gulped and looked at him appealingly, begging him to say some-

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thing or do something to make it easier for her. He merely looked back blankly.

"Please try to understand . . ." she began, and realized that that amounted to asking Lew to find excuses for her, and reddened, and stood silent.

Lew wanted to ask her if she was quite sure, if she could be quite sure so soon after being told he had been Selected. But he still couldn't trust his voice.

And he did understand. He could put the bitterness and the disappointment and the loneliness and the misery on one side. When he did he saw that Hy liked him, even loved him, but not enough to give up Earth for him. She wasn't really selfish, just honest. Perhaps another couple of months and she'd have loved him enough to go with him. Now, *now* was too soon and too late.

He had lost her.

It happened to millions of other lovers, without the trappings of interstellar travel and Selection. He had lost his girl, that was all.

Hy was crying again. "Please go, Lew," she said. "I can't stand it if you just sit there and look at me. If you'd even swear or hit me . . ."

He stood up and looked down on her from his ten-inch advantage in height. She raised her swimming eyes to his.

"I'm sorry, Lew," she whispered again. "Please go. And don't come back. We'd only hurt each other every time we met again. Please go.

His chest was still choked. It was too late to say anything now. He stumbled to the door, and all Hy did was get out of the way.

You couldn't blame her, Lew thought, shutting the door quietly behind him.

Another girl in feathers and silk spoke to him. So did a man in evening dress. He walked past them both and out the back way into the street.

No, you couldn't blame her. If people who were Selected felt Selection was the end of everything, one could hardly expect others to share it voluntarily.

Yet irrationally, now that Hy had so definitely refused to go, Lew told himself that it was a small thing to ask of a girl, that any girl who was sound and honest and worthwhile would have come with him.

What was Selection, after all?

What was it but a challenge to the pioneering spirit, a chance to make wealth beyond anything conceivable on Earth, the dream of generations of scientists, idealists and adventurers?

What was it but that?

It was hell.

II

They gave you three months.

That was the present period of grace, at any rate. It had been longer and it had been shorter, and it would change again. There were strong arguments both ways. It was natural for a man to want plenty of

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time to say his goodbyes, to set things in order, to finish off his life story on Earth. On the other hand it was equally natural for a man who knew he had to go to want to make a quick, clean break.

Meantime it was three months, and while Selected people couldn't lengthen the period, they could reduce it if they liked.

Lew saw no reason why he should wait the full three months. It would have been different if Hy, though not prepared to go with him, had been willing to share his last three months on Earth ...

The morning after he told her about his Selection he called her on the visiphone and asked her if she would marry him — for three months.

She had snapped off the vision as soon as she saw who was calling. With the plate blank, her voice came coolly. "No, Lew. That would only make it worse for both of us, and you know it. If I married you, I'd come with you."

"But if you still feel the same," Lew argued, "you'll be free at the end of the three months, and I won't be able to force you to come."

"I can't argue about it, Lew. If I'm not coming with you, I'm not going to marry you. Don't come with any more schemes like that, Lew — please."

She rang off.

If she meant it, and she obviously did, Lew didn't want his three months. Twenty-four hours after his first intimation of Selection, he was at the Selection Bureau to cut the delay as short as possible.

The Bureau hall was rather like a bank. Such business as there was was almost all with people who had been Selected, and was so uncomplicated that it could be transacted rapidly by clerks behind ticket windows. Since people who had been Selected couldn't get out of it, there were no last-hope interviews with important people. Almost all the business was requests for earlier embarkation dates, applications for particular destinations, and occasional requests for an additional berth for friend, spouse or relative. Requests which were nearly always granted.

It was strange to see so many normal-looking people and know that not one of them would be on Earth in three months' time, or ever again. They all seemed to be taking it very calmly. The Bureau looked like a busy bank or ticket agency or post office or railway depot.

There was a woman standing by a pillar who looked a little like Hy. It was the moon to the sun, sackcloth to silk, but the resemblance was there and made Lew notice her. She was tapping her foot irresolutely. She was the only person around who was miserable and showed it. And she was alone.

Lew looked round again and saw the crowd at the other end of the hall clustered about the big Selection board. He had never been here before, but he knew about that

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board. Selected people were lonely people, except in the very rare cases where a friend happened to be Selected at about the same time. The Selection board showed the whole current list, and lonely people could generally find someone, somewhere, whom they knew, if only slightly. Applications for change of destination weren't always granted, but usually they were.

He might have a glance at that board later.

Meantime, he found himself interested in the solitary woman. He was beginning to guess why she might be alone and irresolute. Perhaps what was different about her was that she hadn't been Selected, but her husband or lover had. And she was wondering whether to ask to go with him or abandon him.

On impulse he crossed the marble floor and spoke to her.

"Go with him," he suggested gently.

She looked startled, and misery was out of her face for the moment. "Do what?" And he saw his guess was wrong.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I thought your . . . husband had been Selected, and you were wondering whether to —"

"No," she said bitterly. "It was the other way round. I was the one who was Selected, and he wasn't my husband. He didn't even have to think. There was no question of his going with me. After all he did and said . . . the louse!"

Her bitterness was vitriolic. Lew felt impelled to defend her lover and his. "You can't expect people to —"

"You can't expect *anything!*" the woman declared passionately. "Unless it's bad, of course. Then you have a chance of being right. Expecting anything good is a waste of time."

Lew grinned involuntarily. It was exactly the opposite of his own point of view through most of his life. He looked at the woman with new interest. Much more interesting than the person exactly the same as yourself is the person exactly the opposite.

She was younger than he had thought. Under thirty, in fact. And she became much better-looking when he managed to forget that fleeting resemblance to Hy. She had Hy's figure, averaged out — two inches less on hips and bust, two more on waist. She had Hy's color, without Hy's vividness — the range cut down, darker lights and lighter darks. She had Hy's dress sense, but instead of using it for dramatic effect she used it for economy. Only on a third or fourth and very close examination did Lew guess that instead of being a rich woman rather carelessly dressed she was a girl working near-miracles on a very slim dress budget.

"Well, I'm an exile-to-be too," he said. "How about us going for a drive or something and consoling each other?"

She shrugged. "Sure."

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"Have you done what you were going to do here?"

"No. I was going to cut my three months to a week. Or less. I don't know. I haven't done it yet. It doesn't matter. That can wait."

Her bitterness, anger and apathy made Lew feel half sympathetic, half amused. In her company he felt rather like a strong, brave man saying a ten-inch wound was just a scratch. He had lost Hy, and yet he hadn't gone to pieces.

"That's right," he said. "What's the hurry?"

They left the Bureau and Lew hired a helicar. The girl stood around indifferently while he arranged things, but her eyes gleamed when money was produced. She was interested in money, apparently. It wasn't cupidity he saw in her eyes, Lew guessed. Money had always been short, and she hadn't been able to get the things she wanted. Hence the feeling that others were more fortunate than herself, and that it was no use expecting anything good, because she'd never get it.

Lew was quite pleased with himself for working this out. Of course, poverty was relative, he reminded himself. The girl was obviously well-educated, though she didn't seem the type who could profit much by education, and she took a certain pretty high standard of living for granted. Her clothes showed that she was used to being fashionable. An ordinary girl of the people, with as little to spend on clothes, would dress much more smartly and much less tastefully.

"I'm Lew Stevenson," he said. "What's your name?"

"Clio Mortondrake," she said as if it didn't matter.

The world didn't exactly teem with Mortondrakes. "Not the chain-store Mortondrakes?" he asked, surprised.

"Precisely those Mortondrakes," she said bitterly. "The rags-to-riches-and-back-to-rags Mortondrakes. That's us. That's always been us."

So his second guess had been wrong too. The truth was she was a girl who looked at money like that because she'd once had it and didn't have it any more.

"It doesn't matter now," he told her cheerfully. "If you'd been a millionaire it wouldn't have made any difference, and you wouldn't have been able to take much of it with you."

She shrugged. The shrug didn't seem to mean much except that she didn't care, and Lew knew that already.

They flew over and around the city, and said not a word about what they were seeing.

"Nobody tells me," said Clio abruptly. "Everyone assumes I know. And I never paid any attention before. What is it going to be like?"

"What's what going to be like?"

"Going away. Life on another world. Why is it so bad?"

The little car dived between two skyscrapers, and a police car three

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levels down flashed an orange light warningly. People weren't supposed to plaster themselves on the faces of buildings without good reason, and Lew's hired car had a green "just touring" flag and light.

"Don't tell me Mortondrakes aren't sent to school," he said.

"I tell you I don't know! I didn't want to know. If you get an injection, do you watch the needle?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't. If something I don't like is going to happen to me, the less I know about it the better. I knew I was going to be Selected some day. It was in the cards. And I didn't want to know what it was going to be like. If people talked about it, I didn't listen."

Yes, that was possible. In one thing at least, Lew reflected, he had been right. Clio was his opposite. He liked to know the worst. Not that he expected it, like Clio — he never expected the worst, but he liked to know what the worst was.

"The whole truth of the matter," he said, "is that there isn't a world in the galaxy, and probably not in any other galaxy either, that's more than slightly similar to Earth. That's all."

"But that can't be all."

"It's enough."

He took the helicar higher and turned southwest towards Sonderley, a country club which was as good a place as any to spend an idle hour or two. It seemed hardly worth while consulting Clio. She would only say she didn't care.

"You're like everybody else," Clio said resentfully. "People talked plenty about Selection when I didn't want to hear it. Now that I do, nobody tells me anything."

"There's books," suggested Lew mildly.

"Books!" Clio sneered. And Lew saw she was right. For some people books weren't a source of information at all.

"All right," he said patiently. "What do you want to know?"

Clio hesitated a moment to gather her thoughts, then plunged. "When you say you've been Selected, it's like saying you've been condemned to death. I know you can never come back to Earth again, but some of the colonies have been pretty well developed, haven't they? They must be to ship back all the things they do — Loganite crystals and deep-frozen Bitl-berries and those funny spices from Kendrick. . . . What's specially bad about being sent away?"

Lew looked into her burning, angry eyes, and laughed. "You mean you've got all worked up about Selection without knowing what it's going to mean to you?"

"Tell me, damn you!" she said with the passion of a girl who at times had had things her own way.

Lew laughed again. Clio's company made gloom almost impossible, he found. You might think you were pretty low, but in comparison with her you were having the time of your life.

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Of course, she might not have that effect on everybody.

"Humanity evolved on Earth," he said, "and no matter how adaptable we may be, Earth's always heaven compared with everywhere else. And that's no theory, it's hard, cold fact. Everyone who goes away wants to come back. At one time there was some pretence that other planets in other systems were wonderful to live on, but that couldn't last, when nobody came back to tell that tale."

"But if other places are so awful, why force people to go to them?"

"Because people will insist on overpopulating Earth."

She didn't understand, and she would never understand, he saw. She was like millions of other people in the last few hundred years who had said, "But why don't they *stop* it?" — totally failing to appreciate that stopping it, whatever it was, would automatically produce two or three other things about which they or others would say, "But why don't they *stop* it?" and so on *ad infinitum*.

So he didn't tell her that with Earth overpopulating itself there was only a limited number of measures to deal with the surplus — global wars or execution or state birth control or exile. These or some variation on them were the only ways, now that the population had reached its highest comfortable level.

"What's wrong?" Clio reiterated. "Why . . . what's so bad about —"

Lew sighed. "All sorts of things, on which I'm not exactly an expert. On Bitl you lose forty or fifty pounds and whatever you eat tastes like straw. On Hapon you have a permanent headache and toothache, whether you have any teeth or not — it must be pretty bad, for often in murder cases the killer says the pain was driving him mad, and he only gets five years. On Kendrick your skin flakes off every month, and your bones soften and you grow crooked before they harden again. On Tractor you have to keep drinking practically continuously, or you dry up. On Tomotan your stomach works three hours on, two off — three hours after eating you're violently sick and you have to rest two hours before —"

Clio was staring at him. "That can't be right," she said flatly. "I don't believe it."

"It's so, whether you believe it or not."

"It can't be. There wouldn't be Selection. People wouldn't go if it was like that. Nobody would stand for it."

The country club appeared and slid smoothly below the helicar. Lew adjusted the landing controls.

"No planet is ever colonized if it's really harmful," he said, not without irony. "You get used to the taste of straw and being able to count all your bones and spewing up your insides every five hours. . . . People live to be eighty or ninety on most of these worlds."

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There was horror in her face as well as resentment now. "They can't send you to *that*, without even a chance to appeal. It's — it's —"

The helicar landed itself automatically. "It's better, I suppose," said Lew, "than execution."

He took Clio's arm and led her across the lawn in the direction of the clubhouse. "How about a swim, or is it too cold?" he asked.

With a gesture of her arm she annihilated swimming, the temperature and the country club — frivolities like Nero fiddling while Rome burned. "I'm not going," she declared passionately. "They can't make me go. I'll kill myself."

"You're not supposed to do that," said Lew chidingly. "It's illegal. You're supposed to be grateful there's an alternative to execution."

"I knew about Selection, but I never knew . . . I'm not going, I tell you! I'll kill myself."

"So you said before. Even if you do kill yourself," he said reasonably, "wouldn't it be as well to wait and see what the alternative is? You can't have Earth, that's out. But maybe you'll find aches, pains, dizziness and all the rest of it preferable to dying. Maybe not. Anyway, the time to decide isn't now, but when you're —"

He broke off as he saw the Kays crossing from the clubhouse to the tennis courts. They saw him at the same time, nudged each other, hesitated, and finally walked towards him, since there could be no pretence that they hadn't seen each other.

Lew introduced Clio and the Kays. Mary naturally had a good look at Clio, but Jack hardly waited for the introduction before he said: "Lew — I'm sorry, really sorry about what happened last night. I didn't realize —"

"Think nothing of it," said Lew.

"But to treat you like that — at a time when —"

He stopped because Mary had kicked him. It was supposed to be a covert kick. Mary meant to be tactful, realizing that Lew didn't want apologies, didn't want to be reminded of the incident at all. But she and Jack were in tennis kit, the kick was as obvious to Lew and Clio as it must have been to Jack, and the situation was even more awkward than before.

There was only one thing that could make it more awkward, and Jack, having been instructed to change the subject, put his finger on it unerringly.

"I hope that Hy —" he began idiotically.

Mary kicked him again and made covert gestures that were presumably meant to indicate that since Lew wasn't with Hy, mention of her wasn't tactful, and also that for the same reason, Hy almost certainly hadn't . . . whatever Jack was going to say he hoped she had. Lew laughed bitterly, knowing he was dramatizing and rather enjoying it. He laughed again, the laugh of a

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man to whom almost everything had happened and the rest soon would.

"Hy decided it would be better if I just went away and didn't come back," he said, overdoing it because if he tried to talk naturally about it he couldn't. "The brush-off. Much the same thing happened to Clio here. So we're consoling ourselves."

Mary darted a glance at Clio's set, miserable expression, tried and failed to find anything of consolation in it, gulped and looked away. Lew laughed again, without histrionics this time.

"Well, Clio and I have some more consoling to do," he said. "See you at the pool after your game?"

"Sure, sure," said Jack, and Mary hustled him away.

"Who's Hy?" Clio asked.

"My ex-girl."

"I know that. What's she like?"

Lew was surprised and amused to find that Clio could work up quite a lot of interest in Hy. After all, he and Clio had only just met, and Clio's interest in Hy could only be because Hy had been Lew's girl and hence was a sort of rival. Like most women, Clio seemed much more interested in Lew now that she knew another girl had once been attracted by him.

Lew not unnaturally decided to augment this interest. "I'll show you," he said.

In one of the winter lounges, gradually coming into use again now that summer was giving way to winter, with fall the battleground, there was a gallery of pin-up pictures. Lew led Clio to Hy's picture and nodded at it nonchalantly.

"There she is," he said.

It was a 3-D color picture, split images set at an angle and compensated, and it was so good, so natural, so delectable that as he looked at it Lew felt once more that empty, rending sensation of loss that had tugged at his heart when he first knew Hy wasn't going to be with him to help him to face whatever he had to face. He felt even worse now than he had then, because he had had time to realize how completely he had lost Hy.

"She's beautiful," said Clio jealously.

Clio's jealousy was almost an invitation. They were alone in the winter lounge and there was a vacuum in Lew's life where Hy had been.

He caught Clio fiercely in his arms and kissed her, pretending she was Hy.

He was astonished by the passion of her response.

III

Lew ceased to believe it couldn't happen, and made the best of it. That was part of the reason why he had always regarded himself as lucky — in retrospect he minimized the misfortunes and appreciated to the full all the slices of good luck. He was resilient and really didn't so much get what he wanted as want what he got.

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That was particularly true of Clio. He had her; he couldn't help having her. So he made the best of Clio, not always an easy job, since she was generally making the worst of herself.

One night in a dim café she murmured: "Promise you'll never leave me, Lew."

"That would be a silly thing to do," he said reasonably. "If there was any way I could stay on Earth, I'd certainly leave you."

"But you love me, don't you?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes."

"What does that mean?" she demanded. "Last night you told me . . ."

"I told you what it was only decent to tell you," Lew sighed. "And it was true enough. Only real men aren't like the ones in women's magazines. They can say things like what I said to you, and mean them, and then go and say the same things to another girl and mean them too."

The anger in Clio's eyes faded to a moody smolder. "Does that mean men can't ever love one woman, honestly?"

"Oh, no. But if that's what you're talking about, you're not the woman," said Lew with cheerful brutality.

However, before Clio could speak, he asked abruptly: "When are we going to get married?"

She gasped, exactly as if a hard-driven football had hit her in the stomach. "Does that mean . . .?"

"Why are you always asking what things mean? I thought it was settled long ago that we were going to get married. Otherwise you've been acting like a tart."

"But we've only just — we hardly know each other."

"We met just after we were Selected. And that's ages ago. We have to get married, or they might not let us go together."

She stared at him, puzzled, uncertain, and of course resentful. She didn't resent his asking her to marry him, but she resented the way he had done it. She wanted to turn the incident into one of the two kinds of scene she was really at home in — a quarrel or a passionate love-scene — but she couldn't quite see how.

"Where are we going together?" she temporized.

"Logan, I think. But you'd better go to an information bureau and get enough facts to make up your mind for yourself. I don't want you blaming me for Logan."

They went over the same ground more affectionately in private. But Lew refused to pretend that it was anything but a marriage of convenience. "Jack Spratt could eat no fat, his wife could eat no lean," he quoted. "We're complements, you and I, Cliopatter. I'm happy and you're miserable. So let's get married and we'll live happily ever after."

It was going to work, too. For Clio couldn't get on Lew's nerves, and Clio, who wasn't *always* utterly miserable, was happier with him than she had ever been before.

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Married couples who were Selected together (which happened once in a blue moon) and married couples who elected to share exile since one of them had been Selected (which happened reasonably often) had the right to stay together and the privilege of nominating their destination. Lew chose Logan; and Clio, once she had been told impartially about the various planets open to them, agreed.

On Logan the conditions, food and settlements were fairly Earth-like. The only disadvantage of the world was that about ten out of every ninety minutes, day and night, were agony. The spasms weren't unlike epileptic fits, quite uncontrollable and entirely incapacitating while they lasted.

They were, as one early explorer-cum-moralist had said, "exactly like a punishment on mankind for not being satisfied with his own world and going where he was not wanted, a regular reminder that on any world but his own little ball of minerals he is an intruder, a usurper and a thief."

The spasms, simply called "the fits," were, true enough, a regular reminder that conditions on Logan weren't quite those of Earth; but their after-effects were negligible, and Loganites for nearly fifty years now had been sure that a prevention or cure was just around the corner. The fits weren't harmful; people lay limp, weak and very sorry for themselves after they had passed, but that was psychological. Once the fits were over people were perfectly capable of the most strenuous physical effort. All sorts of things had been tried hopefully and all had failed. Anesthesia merely set the clock back: for every ninety minutes of consciousness, or normal sleep, there had to be ten minutes of the fits. Drugged sleep gave you a respite, but it was a respite you didn't know about, and to be effective the sedation had to be so deep you were semi-conscious (and subject to the fits) for a long time afterwards.

No, the thing to do was grin and bear it. The only alternative was deleting the grin.

However, Lew and Clio agreed that despite the fact that it was no paradise, Logan was a better place for them than any of the other worlds colonized so far. It took a lot of fortitude to face the knowledge that for the rest of your life you'd have to suffer torture every hour and a half. Ten minutes is a long time if it's ten minutes of pain. Still, that was all they had to face.

So Logan-colonists Lew and Clio were married, and in private he said and did exactly what he should.

In their less intimate moments he still refused to pretend he was madly in love with Clio.

"How could I be, Cliopatter?" he asked, as one reasonable person to another. "What is there about you that anyone could be madly in love with?"

She was less unsure of herself now,

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and didn't get jealous and angry when he talked like that. She merely said, "Oh, go and jump in a lake."

"Married bliss," sighed Lew contentedly. "Aren't we lucky? Made for each other, and just about to go and live on a brave new world."

For a long time he had managed never to think of Hy. Thinking of Hy was an unsatisfactory business, an indulgence that didn't repay itself either in pleasure or in profit.

But he had to say goodbye to her. He had accepted Clio and given up Hy. Nonetheless, he was only human.

He had already said goodbye to all the other people who mattered in his life. His mother he left without unendurable regret: she was being stoical, really enjoying the parting in a way, and since her attitude was a pose he could pose too. The Kays he said goodbye to with some actual relief. They were not so much friends, when he came to think of it, as people he happened to know, people he couldn't help knowing, people he had never been able to help knowing. They were sympathetic enough, but he had realized since his Selection that there was sympathy and sympathy, and the Kays' was the kind he didn't particularly want.

Last of all he said goodbye to Hy. Clio was with some relatives who were the only people on Earth who mattered at all to her. It seemed a good opportunity to see Hy for the last time, if she would be seen.

It was a strange goodbye.

He had been warned. He had heard about a lot of strange goodbyes. He knew some of the reasons and could guess others. People felt guilty about not having been Selected when somebody else had been. They were glad to have escaped the fate of their lover, brother, sister or friend, but had the decency not to rejoice too openly. They remembered *There but for the grace of God go I.* They realized, too, that the next time — in a month, six months or ten years — the grace of God might be absent.

They even, some of them, realized that some day they might be glad of a friend on an alien world. They thought, they even hoped it was goodbye for ever. But it might not be.

He wrote Hy a brief note to tell her he was coming, so that she could avoid him if she was really determined on it. He knew she had two hours free after the first show at ten o'clock, and he told her he'd pick her up if she was at the back door at ten fifteen.

He also told her laconically that he left on the ship for the Shury section the next morning.

She was waiting for him. He hadn't expected that. He had felt he should make some attempt to bid her goodbye forever, but if she refused, that would be that and it would be out of his hands.

It was a warm night, probably the last warm night of the year. But

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warm nights would return to Earth; Lew would not. Perhaps in appreciation of this Hy appeared in a particularly fetching summer frock and had taken particular care with her hair and had a special shy, friendly smile for him.

It was different, altogether different, from the last time. Almost they were two different people.

They walked, and at first they talked like two people of the same sex who were friendly but who didn't know each other very well.

"It's quite definite, Lew?" Hy asked.

"Absolutely. It always was."

"I know, but since it was you, I thought somehow you'd get out of it. I . . . I hoped you would."

"I felt like that myself for a while," Lew admitted. "As though this couldn't be happening to me. But it's happening all right."

"Where exactly are you going?"

He told her about Logan. He didn't see any reason to mention Clio — his wife Clio.

She shuddered. "Is that the best you can do for yourself? I couldn't stand that, Lew. I haven't the courage."

She didn't speak as if there had ever been any question of her having to stand it. It was an impersonal discussion on her side.

Lew kept it impersonal too. "It seemed the best. I don't think it's courage that'll be needed so much as ability to take things as they come, and not before. They say that if you can manage not to anticipate the fits, you can stand them pretty well. But if you spend eighty minutes worrying about the next fit, it's bound to be hell *all* the time."

Hy shuddered again. She was so small and delicate-looking and exquisite that it seemed almost indecent to talk to her of pain, let alone suggest that she should go to Logan.

They made a short hop in an air-taxi and continued their walk out in the green belt between cities. They talked on without interruption.

"Will there ever be an alternative to Selection, do you think?" Hy asked. She was like a young, shy, inexperienced girl out with someone who might perhaps become a boy friend, not Hy Hendon saying a sophisticated goodbye to the man she had nearly married.

"Not now," said Lew reflectively. "Too late. This is one of the things that are easier to start than stop. You know, the colonies were started before Earth was overpopulated, but by the time people were beginning to think life was too hard on the other planets for the settlements to be worth maintaining, and was going to *stay* too hard, their exports were becoming vital in commerce, from rare minerals to rare foods — and even more important, the settlements were needed as an outlet for Earth's surplus."

Automatically, without pausing, he took Hy's arm, as lightly and cautiously as if it were indeed their first meeting.

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"At first," he went on, "the surplus took itself away voluntarily, with much blowing of trumpets. But soon it had to be Selection or —"

"I don't want you to misunderstand, Lew," said Hy abruptly. "This is still goodbye."

She didn't say that before time. Almost without knowing it Lew had been allowing himself to think that Hy had changed her mind, that her shyness was merely the natural result of having said *no* and not being quite sure he still wanted her to say *yes*, that Clio didn't matter, that the Lew Stevenson luck had held after all, that he only had to say the right thing and Hy would be in his arms — forever.

She must have seen that in his face, for she said firmly, "I said all I wanted to say last time, Lew. Except perhaps this. I'm a dancer — that's my life. What could I do on Logan?"

"There's always show business," he said. "Anywhere."

She shook her head, refusing to argue. Lew could see for himself the difference between Broadway and a tiny hall on Logan, and didn't press the point.

"Why come out with me at all, then?" he asked pettishly.

"You'll remember me, I suppose," she said quietly. "I know I'll remember you, Lew. Let's make this . . . something to remember, shall we?"

They stopped and she looked up at him unwaveringly. She didn't move when he put his hands on her shoulders.

"Something nice to remember," she said softly. "The best of you, Lew, and the best of me."

"But — you have to be back —"

"Never mind that."

"You said . . . you said it would only make it worse for both of us if —"

"Yes, if we'd seen a lot of each other and forced ourselves to say goodbye after goodbye, if we'd got married knowing we meant all we were swearing only for three months, if we'd lived together and reminded each other every instant of the time that it would soon be over forever . . . I didn't want that."

She smiled up at him appealingly.

"Where shall we go?" he asked abruptly.

A faint shadow, perhaps of disappointment, passed over her face. "I didn't mean . . . necessarily . . . that we'd go anywhere. But if that's what you want —"

"What else would I want?" he demanded. "A prayer?"

She grasped his arm. They were in a park, quite strongly lit by the lights on the nearby highway. He could see the pleading in her face.

"I said — something nice to remember," she told him. "The best of you, Lew. Not the worst."

"Won't I be easier to forget if I act like a swine?" he asked harshly.

"I don't want to forget you. I feel guilty, Lew. I don't know, but . . . if I were brave enough, I might come

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with you. I'm not sure. Anyway, I was right that first night. I'm *not* brave enough, and I'm not coming. So you can forget that."

"You just want a nice, sentimental night out, holding hands, me telling you how wonderful and beautiful you are, you having a good cry. And some day when you want a good publicity story you can get someone to write this up — The Tears Behind My Smile, by Hy Hendon."

There *were* tears in her eyes now. "Please, Lew," she said.

"You always say that. Say please and look appealing and a girl like you can always get what she wants, I suppose. Except this time. I don't feel like being tender and sentimental and laying my head on your soft breast. Not tonight."

"I shouldn't have seen you at all," she said chokingly.

"Not," he said bitterly, "if you wanted a tender memory. I'm fresh out of tender memories. I still want you, God help me, if you'll come to Logan with me. Short of that, I'm not interested."

She was crying openly, not even bending her head. Her face was still raised to his, tears welling from her eyes and wetting her cheeks, the sobs shaking her whole tiny body.

"A magnificent act," he commented. "Some people would say that if you cared as much about me as you're making out by crying like that, you'd want to come to Logan with me."

Hy couldn't cry any more than she was doing already.

"I won't come back with you to your apartment," said Lew. "You're not the only woman on Earth. Thanks all the same for the offer."

With one last gulping sob Hy turned from him and ran away. Her light dress showed through the bushes for a second or two, and then there was nothing left of her but a faint lingering fragrance in the still air.

IV

The next morning, as the tender took them out to the *Emperor*, the ship which was to go all the way to the Shury sector with some two thousand new, unwilling colonists, Lew kept thinking glumly that Hy had been right and he had never been wronger in his life.

He wasn't exactly ashamed of himself and he didn't particularly want to apologize to Hy. She was out of his life anyway. But now that it was too late he saw how much pleasanter it would have been if he had acted the night before as Hy wanted him to act, instead of always having to remember, whenever he thought of Hy, that last stupid, angry, unreasonable, bitter scene. . . .

Anyone but Clio would have noticed how silent and moody he was, but Clio was so silent and moody herself that Lew's brooding passed without comment. He kept telling himself to forget the whole thing,

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and eventually succeeded, to some extent. At least he didn't remember it all the time.

The deep-space ships were as luxurious as the old ocean liners. Since they were built in space, never landed and never had to withstand the stresses of gravity, they could afford to be huge, roomy and comfortable. It took very little more energy, relatively, to drive a vast ship around the galaxy than a tiny ship; and the larger the liner, the more passenger space could be ingeniously converted, like trick 3-D scene-shifting, into cargo holds for the less dramatic but more profitable journey home. Thus the *Emperor*, like the other ships of its class, was as different from the tiny, cramped tenders which had to battle their way up to it out of Earth's gravity as a liner from a rowboat.

As soon as Lew had got over the worst of his regrets over that final scene with Hy, he took Clio round the ship to gape at its marvels. He soon became interested himself, and eventually he managed to interest Clio too.

Most of the ship was kept under 1G, but there were restrooms and playrooms with no gravity and adaptation rooms where people could get used to gravity weaker or stronger than Earth's. There were swimming pools, cinemas, theaters, gymnasiums and every other type of recreation room for which there might be any demand. Waste didn't matter, for unused space in any interstellar ship meant so much extra cargo space for the return trip.

Clio and Lew wandered about, finding one unexpected amenity after another. There was even a park, a seeming luxury which was actually one of the most important pieces of machinery aboard the ship, the atmosphere plant. The greenery looked normal enough, but it was specially developed for the job.

Bit by bit Clio lost her gloom and became interested. Presently she was acting almost like the other passengers they saw, staring round-eyed at the marvels of the ship and exclaiming as they found something they'd never have expected to find in a spaceship.

However, she soon found the inevitable drawback. "This is all very well," she said, "but it's no preparation for life in a colony, is it?"

Lew grinned. "Would you rather we slept on beds of nails all the way to Logan?"

"You know what I mean — this is luxury. It's a long time since I had anything like this."

"Don't you like being comfortable? I do."

"But it'll be terrible to leave this. Everything we want here, and then . . . Logan."

Lew shrugged. He couldn't see that point of view. He was perfectly capable of eating, drinking and being merry in the expectation of dying the next day. His fits of depression were purely temporary, and it took

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a good deal to depress him in the first place. He was bobbing up already after that dreadful affair with Hy the night before. The three-month journey to Logan looked like it might be quite pleasant.

"Another thing," he told Clio after a visit to the ship's library to learn anything more he could learn about Logan and the colony there. "This colonization business isn't as bad as I thought."

"The fits?" said Clio. "You mean they're not so bad . . .?"

"No, I don't mean that. I mean the general conditions, not only on Logan but on all the colonized worlds. You see, Earth *needs* the settlements, people simply have to be sent to them. So there's a big effort to make life on all the colonies as comfortable as it can possibly be."

"How can it be comfortable when —"

"I know, nothing can be done about Logan's fits, Hapon's toothache, Tomotan's nausea and the rest of it. But since that's so, the governments of the colonies, backed by Earth's governments, have to do the best they can for us in other ways. There are grants and subsidies and assured jobs and —"

"Oh, *that*," said Clio.

"The standard of life isn't anything like as high as on Earth, true," Lew said. "But that's got its advantage too. Earth subsidizes the colonies, and hardly notices it. You and I, Clio, are going to be pretty well off on Logan but for one thing."

"What's that?"

"The fits, of course," said Lew cheerfully.

Clio shuddered, as she still did almost every time the fits were mentioned.

The time passed rapidly and pleasantly on the ship. There was something for everybody. At first nearly everybody visited the big newsroom at least once a day and read the latest news of Earth, picked up on the booster radio which was matched to the velocity of the ship, and classified every day into a score of different periodicals covering different angles and subjects. Soon, however, the more adaptable among the passengers had become more interested in the *Emperor*, their present environment, than the Earth, which they would never see again. And the practical people were already learning all there was to be learned about their destination, their new home. Gradually the numbers of people visiting the newsroom dropped, and those who still went there had acquired a galactic outlook, reading the news of the cosmos and not merely the news of one world, Earth.

Lew gave himself a good talking-to about Clio and Hy early on the trip.

"Now look here," he told himself, "you were in love with Hy before you met Clio, and that was all right. When you met Clio, you were supposed to be through with Hy, so there was nothing to stop you taking up with Clio. And I suppose if you

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liked you could even try to justify yourself for being ready to ditch Clio at the last minute if Hy would change her mind and have you."

He looked sternly at himself in a mirror and wagged an admonitory finger at himself. "Now you don't pretend to be particularly honest," he went on. "At least, you do, but not to me. Nevertheless, you like to be able to think you're a nice guy at heart, which means that people have to be able to trust you. And from now on, come what may, you've got to give Clio a square deal. Is that understood?"

Apparently it was.

Soon after that he took over the entertainment of Clio — and himself, of course — and, with the help of the magnificent amenities of the *Emperor*, made a surprisingly good job of it.

She played tennis indifferently, came to the movies with him indifferently, walked in the park with him indifferently. But when they danced, some warmth came into her and it might by some stretch of the imagination be said she enjoyed herself. When he made her dress not merely tastefully, but as attractively as possible, when he urged her to make herself the smartest woman on the ship, when after arguing and fighting with her over her clothes and make-up and hair style he told her she was lovely, she came to life a little more and very nearly took it like any pretty woman.

"Promise you'll never leave me, Lew," she said to him one night.

She had whispered the same thing once before, and he had told her calmly it would be a silly thing to do. But this time he promised, and meant it, and kissed her lips, and stroked her hair.

The passengers on the *Emperor* never saw the actual crew of the ship, except the stewards. Crews of spaceships were in a curious, special position. They were the only people, apart from a few privileged scientists, astronomers, business executives, statesmen and envoys, who could go from Earth to the colonies and come back. As far as Selection was concerned they were Terrans, subject to the same conditions as anyone else. They had the advantage, when any of them happened to be Selected, of knowing at first hand what many of the colonies were like.

Clio and Lew played tennis again, and went to the movies again, and walked in the park again — and now it could hardly be said that Clio was indifferent. Lew was fully aware that his motives weren't entirely selfless — life for him was much pleasanter if Clio was enjoying life too, and there was also the self-satisfaction of doing a very difficult job — but he did feel, quite often, a glow of self-righteousness as he saw Clio blooming into an attractive and sometimes-quite-happy woman.

He seldom spoke to her directly about it. Once, however, he did remark:

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"You're quite a lot younger than the woman I married, Clio."

"Am I?" she asked, half-suspicious, half-pleased. "How?"

"When I first met you you were a woman of twenty-nine and you looked thirty-five."

"Oh, no!" she said, laughing, protesting.

"Now look at you," he said, with a sweep of his arm. "You're a girl. A pretty girl. You could be eighteen . . ." she made a derisive but not displeased denial . . . "but you're probably at least twenty-one. Sometimes you forget to frown, and that brow of yours smooths out and I think that after all maybe it wasn't such a bad idea marrying you."

"If only," she said, with her sudden, startling passion, "I had met you and loved you on Earth, and there hadn't been Selection."

It would have been needlessly brutal to point out that if there hadn't been Selection he'd have been married to Hy Hendon, not her.

"Look, Cliopatter," Lew said. "I think you'd be a lot happier if you could really face this question of the fits."

She shuddered.

"Don't do that," he said sharply. "You're building them into something that could break you. And it's quite unnecessary."

"You can't just not worry."

"Maybe not, but you can try. Clio, you've shivered like that about a hundred times since we decided that despite the fits Logan was the best place for us. And you know as well as I do that the first time you'll have any real reason to be sorry for yourself is when you *have* your first fit, on Logan."

"I know, but —"

"You know, but you can't help it. Clio, you've heard of people who eat arsenic, swallow doses that'd kill you or me, because they've been building up from small doses so steadily that the body's got used to it. Well, I've talked to some of the stewards on the ship about the Loganese fits — they get them while they're there too, you know, those who land — and they say the fits are just like that. The first time it comes it's certainly pretty bad, and the ten minutes it lasts seem to go on forever. But when it's over you feel fine and you say to yourself, 'Is that all? It's bad, but not as bad as I expected.' Then the next one comes, and you ride that and tell yourself you'll be able to stand Logan after all. You're ready for the next, too, and though you see it's no fun having to stand sixteen or seventeen spasms like that every twenty-four hours, you realize it has to be done and you'll do it."

Clio shuddered again. "Agony every eighty minutes," she exclaimed. "Oh, I've been told I've no imagination, and maybe it's true that I've only the wrong kind. But I can't help shuddering whenever I think of that — ten minutes of pain. I can imagine that. You know, when a dentist takes out a tooth, or a doc-

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tor sticks needles in you, or someone treads on your toe, you have a pain. It shakes you for a minute. But that pain lasts a fraction of a second, not —"

"Not six hundred seconds," Lew supplemented. "I know what you mean. All the same . . ."

He kept trying to get her to see what to him was so obvious — that if the endurance of pain could be confined to the period of the pain, it was so much easier to bear. She didn't deny it. She simply couldn't put it out of mind the way he could. As she said, she just couldn't not worry.

Otherwise, she kept developing into a happier, younger, prettier girl. Lew sometimes felt like Pygmalion. He was having an effect on Clio which no one had ever had before. She dismissed without regret any mention of the man she had lost by her Selection, the man who had been to her what Hy had been to Lew. Clio had never seen him again, never wanted to see him, and consequently accepted quite easily the inference that Lew had never seen Hy again and never wanted to see her.

There came a time when Clio was laughing and happy almost all day. Curiously, in private she became much more tender, much less passionate. And Lew regarded that as a good sign too. There had always been something feverish and wild-eyed about Clio's love-making. It hadn't been the passion of a happy, healthy girl, but that of a frightened woman, uncertain where she was and where she was going.

Clio was growing into a happy, healthy girl again.

It was not, of course, a business of a few days or a few weeks. It would take a long time. The world which she had been so reluctant to leave had not been very kind to Clio. It had hurt her and scarred her, and the scars hadn't even begun to heal until Lew met Clio.

Lew thought for a while that she must never learn the truth about Hy, reconsidered the matter and decided that all that mattered was that she shouldn't learn it the wrong way. So he told her himself, enough to cover anything she might ever hear. Hy might write. Someone else might write, mentioning Hy. Anyway, he told Clio, even about that last, frustrated goodbye.

Clio wasn't unduly concerned. That was in the past.

So now all there was to worry about was Logan itself.

"Only a week more," said Clio, and shuddered.

They were in their bedroom, a chamber fit for a king, with a lounge and bathroom attached. They had been at a dance, and Clio had unashamedly enjoyed herself. But now, tired, she remembered what she had managed to forget completely for hours.

She reached behind her back and unfastened her dress. Then she froze in dusky, shadowy thought, thought in which black, shapeless things

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moved and small nameless creatures darted and scurried. Lew glanced up and saw her as the cloud passed across her brow and shadowed her face.

Her off-the-shoulder dress slowly unfolded like a flower opening to the sun. It hung wide about her for a moment and then gradually peeled itself down to her hips, where it stuck. Still Clio stood like a carved statue.

"Clio," said Lew gently. Nothing happened. He could almost see the misty, frightening shapes gathering in her brain and driving away all pleasure, contentment and anticipation.

She was almost in the Venus de Milo pose, except that she had arms. Her dress had stuck like Venus's drape and her features had classical beauty. Lew liked her like that and wanted her to stay like that forever. On the other hand he knew that completely oblivious of her physical existence she was fighting one more of her silent, murky battles of the mind.

The last, he hoped.

He stepped silently up to her and kissed her gently, tenderly, insistently. She shuddered but paid no attention otherwise.

He kissed her again, more urgently.

Her eyes moved to meet his. "Only a week more," she repeated. But Lew knew her thoughts had been of something deeper than that, something unreal. A chilling misery and a terrifying loneliness.

"Clio," he said, "you're safe with me. I won't run away. I'll always be around when you need help."

"I know," she said moodily. "But this'll be over. Oh, why is this made so perfect? I'd do anything to live like this for always. It's a long time since I was so happy . . . in fact I was never so happy. But they get you used to this and then take it away forever."

Lew tried to understand, but failed.

"It'll be perfect on Logan too, Cliopatter," he said reassuringly.

But she shook her head and shuddered.

"Well, let's enjoy this last week," he said, trying another tack. If there was going to be any worrying done, any regrets, the time for them certainly wasn't yet. "Let's make it a perfect week. The last week of our honeymoon."

They did, more or less. There was a lot of pleasure in it. But Clio was too close to Logan now to be able to forget it at all. When she was happy, it was the feverish, terrified happiness of people with a shadow always behind them.

And in their more intimate moments, the new tenderness and softness disappeared and Clio was once more feverishly passionate.

She would settle down once they were on Logan, Lew told himself. Everybody who was Selected and went to the colonies did. Well, nearly everybody. Their lives were knocked apart, but most people had

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the resilience to put them together again, when they had to.

Lew had.

Even that nasty, stupid farewell to Hy no longer bothered him. It would make it easier for her to forget him, and leave her with fewer regrets. She would marry someone else, someone rather like him, and in a few years she would be secretly thankful that Lew had been Selected and left her free to meet the *real* man of her life.

And as for him, he could be quite happy with Clio once a few more turning-points had been safely passed.

"Some people," he had told Clio, in one of their tenderest moments, "are only skin deep. You scratch them, and there's nothing underneath. You can never be really happy or unhappy with people like that. They're not very real people, no matter how beautiful or good-natured they may be. They're just shells, and they never matter very much to anyone.

"But you're not like that, Cliopatter. You matter, even though you're not as beautiful and good-natured and happy as some of the shells. When you're sad, that matters, and it's worth taking the trouble of making you happy again."

Clio smiled, and when Clio smiled it was like the sun breaking through stormclouds.

The night before the transfer to the tender which was to land them on Logan Clio was curiously quiet and serene.

"You're right, Lew," she whispered as she snuggled close to him. "I hadn't realized I was a coward, making myself incapable of facing things when they came by telling myself I *couldn't* face them. . . . I know you told me that, time and again, but being told isn't any use — you have to see things for yourself. Maybe I can face it after all."

Lew held her tight in the darkness. "That's my Cliopatter," he murmured. "Sometimes it helps to remember that you're not the only one — that what's happening to you has happened and is happening to millions of other people. Does it help?"

"Yes, Lew," she murmured, "yes."

Lew slept, as usual, like the dead. When he wakened, Clio wasn't with him.

He got out of bed, yawned and scratched, rumpled his hair. Sleepily he noticed that Clio's wrap lay across a chair. So she was dressed. No, under the wrap was the pantaloon suit she had laid out for the transfer — there would be no artificial gravity on the tender.

She was in the bathroom, then.

He ambled over and opened the door of the bathroom. Empty. Where could she be without her wrap and not dressed? Even in the lounge she'd be one or the other. . . .

Well, there was no need to come to the conclusion she had committed suicide or something. Probably she had wakened early, hadn't wanted to disturb his sleep, and had gone on

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a last tour of the wonderful ship she had come almost to love — since it was the only place where she had ever been happy.

He looked in the lounge.

"Oh, there you are, Lew," Clio said, and smiled up at him.

He frowned. "What . . ."

She was lying on the sofa, wearing one of her loveliest evening dresses — the one, he remembered, in which he had once said she looked prettiest. But there was something about the way she lay . . .

He was at her side in a flash, touching her, feeling her.

She smiled. "No, not that way. I'd never have been able to shoot myself, or stick a knife in myself. The only way I could do it was drink something, without thinking about it, and then —"

She raised a hand to stop him as he tensed to jump up. "No, it's too late, Lew. I wouldn't have let you know if it wasn't."

Nevertheless he jumped for the phone that linked every room on the *Emperor*.

"No, please don't do that, please," Clio begged. "If you do, there'll be doctors and officers dashing about . . . and they can't do anything. You needn't worry about being blamed for this — I've left letters and things that show —"

"Clio, why, *why?*" Lew exclaimed, dropping beside her again.

"You know why. I just can't face it."

"But how do you know you can't?"

"Don't let's talk about it any more, Lew. You know, I should have made up my mind to do this long ago. Don't think I'm unhappy. I'm not. I'm very happy indeed."

And Lew saw that she was telling the truth.

"This way I've had all the best and escaped the worst," said Clio. "The only thing I should be sorry about is leaving you. But you'll be all right, Lew. You always are. Nobody ever needs to worry about you."

Lucky Lew, he thought bleakly.

But he managed to do what she wanted him to do. He kissed her for the last time and waited with her, without saying any more, until it wasn't worth waiting any longer.

The officers and stewards, from the sympathetic, practiced way they handled things, were not unused to incidents like this. They were much more concerned about Lew than about Clio, and when they found that he was capable of working out his own salvation without going off to some quiet corner and committing suicide himself, they left him decently in peace.

Hy, then Clio. He wandered about the ship as he had once wandered about a city on Earth and tried to realize that this had happened to him.

Clio was right, of course. He would be all right, as he had been before. As he would be again, every time fate saw fit to give him another buffet and work out with a stop

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watch how long it took him to get over it.

Why, why hadn't she waited? Maybe Logan *would* have been more than she could stand. But surely the only sane thing was to wait and see. Suicide wasn't always insane. Lew could think of circumstances in which suicide was perfectly reasonable — and perhaps, for Clio, the circumstances of Logan would have fitted the bill. Perhaps.

He didn't understand, and he realized he would never understand.

What mattered now wasn't understanding, but somehow getting himself into a state of comparative peace again. Peace! — would he ever know peace? *He* still had to land on Logan. He hadn't escaped that.

Well, perhaps the agony of Logan and the agony of having lost Clio would act on each other and make the next few days more bearable.

He kept seeing Clio in all the high spots of their brief life together. Clio as he had first seen her, standing alone against the pillar. Clio of the burning, hungry kisses, insatiable, passionate. Clio beginning to turn into the happy girl she should have been. Clio remembering, being reminded, that she was young and attractive. Clio becoming more attractive as she became happier, and happier as she became more attractive.

Most of all, Clio as she had frozen in her Venus de Milo pose, looking as lovely as she ever had in all the time he had known her — and at the same time, he knew now, disintegrating mentally.

Oh, yes, he would get over it. There wasn't the smallest risk of his going the same way as Clio. There never was, whatever happened to him. The fact that even now he couldn't understand how Clio could do a thing like that proved that he was stable.

And yet, he wondered if some day it might not happen that he found things piled on him so cruelly, so heavily that the only way to get peace was Clio's way. . . .

No, that was dramatizing. He might dramatize, but he knew the essential difference between pretending and doing.

He visited the various places in the ship, deserted now as the other passengers prepared to disembark, where Clio and he had danced, played games, talked and made love. He went into the library (where Clio had never been) and tried to interest himself in a book. He went into the newsroom and had a last, absent glance through the news of the Earth he wasn't going to see again.

He seemed to be drawn into the reading room, to the latest Selection list, and to the page that . . .

But it was natural, in any list, that he should look under the letter H and make sure that Hy's name wasn't there.

Only it was.

Hyacinth Hendon, 22, and all the

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rest of it, to put it beyond doubt. The name, her age, the city, when she had been Selected — *two months ago,* and he had never as much as glanced at the list.

Finally, where she was going, the colony she had chosen or to which she had been directed.

Logan.

He didn't know what to feel, at first. This time Clio and Hy did really cancel each other out and he felt neither pleasure nor pain.

He went back to the rooms he had shared with Clio and finished packing. There was no sign of Clio now. All her things had been packed. He didn't know what had happened to them and he would never ask.

Clio was dead, and Hy would be out in a few months.

It was difficult to remember what was decent and not jump for joy. The pictures of Clio were fading already and the older but stronger, more vital ones of Hy were covering them over.

He knew what to feel now.

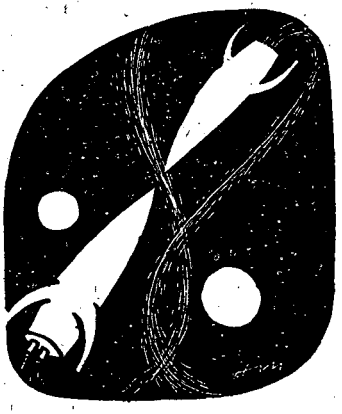
"I'm sorry, Clio," he murmured. "Maybe you were right. Maybe you knew. Anyway, I played fair by you, Cliopatter . . . poor Cliopatter. Goodbye . . ."

He thought of the landing on Logan, the landing which Clio hadn't been able to face, and he thought of Hy, who hadn't been able to face any of it, not even the start of the trip, not even when it would have been her own free choice. If you couldn't take it when it was voluntary, what happened when they forced it on you? Or was that just what made all the difference?

His mind asked questions, but his heart was singing.

Hy was coming; that was enough.

He had always been the luckiest fellow he knew.



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"Evohe!" sighs Paris in the charming song in Offenbach's La Belle Hélène, *"but these goddesses do have strange ways!" Strange indeed was the contest on Mount Ida in which Paris was forced to award a golden apple (and start the Trojan War); but goddesses being what they are, it is not unlikely that the situation might arise again . . . and that a humble potato cake might serve as well as a golden apple.*

The Potato Cake

by PAULINE CLARKE

THE SAND WAS HOT, WHITE HOT and the boulders were hot and even the thin grass on the bank behind the beach was peaky with the heat: and as for Seumas Cavanagh himself, he was so hot that there was nothing for it but to rip off his clothes, lay them by this hot boulder which, glory be, was like a girdle to his unwary hand, and taking great care not to crush the potato cake concealed in his pocket with his discarded boots, to run over the rise to the beach in his thirst for the sea.

The pebbles and the shingle were hot too as Seumas's feet crunched in them down the slope, rejoicing in the lack of clothes on his body. Then he lifted his eyes to the gentle curtseying sea, and gracious heavens, three naked women were coming up out of the foam from having a bathe.

"Mary and all the Saints!" gasped Seumas and turned his back to them quick, and ran up the shingle again. For he was a shy young man. And he had never before in his life seen one naked woman, let alone three.

"Glory be to God," he said again dodging behind his boulder. "It is the wrong place I have chosen after all." And he began throwing on his clothes quickly for the sake of the three naked women walking up the shingle.

But he was only human, and could not restrain a peep round the boulder.

"Michael and all the Angels! It is not they that care," he said.

For the three women came over the shingle with such grace and straightness it took his breath away. Neither did it appear that they felt abashed, not in the least. As for shame, thought Seumas, they do not know the word. Far from cowering from the gaze of man, they moved their limbs with such satisfaction

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and pleasure, it was charming to see them. Seumas drew back behind the scorching boulder, for he was certain they had not noticed him, and he was not the one to make them shy.

The salt water glistened as it dried upon them, one lifted her arms and threw back golden hair. Another stooped and smoothed a silky leg, picking a pebble from between pink toes.

"Ah, dear," sighed Seumas, "the beauty!" And forgot the extreme improperness of the scene in his joy.

Just below him, they flung themselves down on the white sand which received their limbs softly, and, Seumas thought, is less white than they are, for they are silvery white. Or thought he, to put it another way, the shingle which is golden is less golden than their cheeks which are luminous gold, praise be to God.

And he lay on his stomach to watch them. For here he was, a prisoner. He could not steal away for the scrunch of his feet would betray him, confuse them, and spoil the beautiful scene with anger and fright no doubt.

Neither did Seumas Cavanagh want to.

He could hear them talking in tones idle and sweet as the sea on the shingle; but he could not hear what they said. And all the while below at the edge of the water the little waves beat softly and spread lacily. It was a mannerly sea, today, and no rough booming to terrify these sweet ladies, Seumas thought.

They had drifted, he could hear, into some argument, for the full voice, the strong voice and the light low voice rose and fell, back and forth, louder and louder. And indeed very often it was all three tones together and Seumas could not distinguish the one from the other.

"Now, mercy on us," he said, "they could not be going to spoil the peaceful scene with a cackling quarrel. That is not what I should expect of such ladies."

But that was indeed what was happening. One was pitching stones down the beach, hard and fast, as if her anger boiled over, another tossed back contemptuous hair, the third flung out an arm (so slender, so sweet) furiously as if she would smite the bare limbs near her.

"Holy Mary, what a pity, what a pity," Seumas muttered in genuine grief at the sight. And some alarm; for if they fell upon each other, by heavens, to whose bright rescue should he go? And was it not certain that the appearance of a spying man from behind a boulder would enrage them more? They were standing now, their golden cheeks flushed, their limbs shaking with rage. In his tremendous agitation and the heat of the sunshine, Seumas Cavanagh sneezed.

The sneeze echoed from the boulder and in all the hollows round.

Seumas flattened himself like a starfish and cursed his luck. But they turned, as one. Into the hazy air, dancing with the heat, their

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anger evaporated. The air, in consequence, grew even hotter. With no shyness whatever they beckoned Seumas to come.

"Glory be to God," he muttered, "what a predicament, for Seumas himself. I had better go."

He scrambled up and his bare feet (he had not had time to put on his boots) crunched once more down the shingle, and his eyes in his blushing face saw three beautiful pairs of feet.

"Which of us, Seumas Cavanagh, is the most beautiful?" said the full voice. "You will judge better if you take a less restricted view," she added.

"The feet are a beauty, but only a pedestal for higher beauty," said the strong voice.

"And even the charms of the legs," said the light, low voice, "are surmountable."

Seumas's wretched eyes travelled past the knees to the full view of the lady with the full voice. Holy angels, but she was beautiful, Seumas sighed, forgetting his shyness. Her hair, burning brown, fell over her round shoulders, in her queenly face her eyes were wide, brown, melting as the eyes of cattle: and the way she stood was regal. She was the queen of beauty, Seumas thought, and he smiled with delight at her.

"O it is the queen you are for certain," he said, and in his voice was awe.

He turned his heel in the sand, and looked at the lady with the strong voice. Heaven be praised, she was grand! So tall, so taut, her muscles so tense, ah, she was fine and upstanding indeed. She was like a wave of the water. He looked into her face, and it seemed to him wiser than the face of woman, and her eyes were bright like a bird's. Her lips curved, certain of her victory.

"Dear me," Seumas said, "you are all beautiful for sure; and how it depends how a man likes them!" he added.

For the curve of this lady's lip seemed cool to Seumas, and there was fear in his voice as he looked at the wisdom in her eye.

He turned a half turn again in the sand, and his eyes lighted on the third lady.

Seumas Cavanagh was speechless, but there was love in his thoughts as he looked at her.

Mary, she was grave, and she was tender, the tilt of her breasts, the length of her limbs, the charm of her eye! She was how Seumas Cavanagh liked them, slender and evasive, and beneath his solemn gaze her eyes grew a little, a very little, bashful, her lashes drooped.

And Seumas said nothing.

"You must give a prize to the loveliest, Seumas Cavanagh," said the liquid, full-voiced.

Seumas Cavanagh jumped, for he had forgotten the others. He dug his toes in the sand, thrust his hand in his pocket, and drew out the potato cake a little the worse for his lying upon it.

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He shivered slightly, remembering their anger, and prepared to run. He gave the potato cake into the gentle hand of the lady with the low, light voice, quickly, before he should change his mind and have to consider again.

"Again!" said the full voice, full with queenliness so that Seumas trembled.

"Will they never learn sense!" said the strong voice, cold with pity.

Seumas's lady ate her potato cake and smiled. And before he could say anything they ran all three down the shingle, the sound of their feet rushed through his ears, the flash of their limbs dazzled his eyes, and they plunged creamily into the water, and swam out to sea. Seumas looked about for their clothes, but no clothes were there. Mercy on us, had he driven them to despair? Had they gone to drown themselves, by all the saints?

Seumas Cavanagh rushed down into the foam.

"Come back! Come back! For it's drowned you'll be if you swim too far! Come back! I will go now, and leave you to yourselves!" he shouted. He could see the pearly limbs still beneath the water, he could hear them cut the green sea. The three heads bobbed, far out and further out.

"What have I done?" said Seumas, sadly. And he shaded his eyes and watched till the bobbing heads could be seen no more; ah, one, two, behind a wave. No third. Only a seabird rose off the water and turned in the air, crying.

He walked up the shingle forgetting his bathe, and by his boots was Mary O'Casey, sitting slim, waiting.

"And who might you be a-hollering at?" she asked.

"Mary, I have seen three beautiful women, come up out of the foam, naked as a sun shaft, as God made them —"

"The hussies!" said Mary.

"Ah, but the beauty!" said Seumas. "I'll never see it again."

"That you will not, Seumas Cavanagh, if it's me you're looking at," she said.

"It was the right way to bathe in the sea," he sighed.

"It was a shame and a disgrace. Where are they now?"

"Gone, gone, swum out to sea before I could stop them. And it's drowned they'll be, for they are far out of sight."

"You've spun the whole story, improper as it is, to tempt me," said Mary.

"No, I have not that. Why, I have given away my potato cake for a prize to the most lovely, and I could eat it now, moreover."

"You'll be having no potato cake from me. And what was the most lovely like, Seumas Cavanagh?"

"She was the most like you yourself, Mary O'Casey," he said.

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William Sansom, who has won unanimous critical recognition as one of England's outstanding younger writers, served throughout World War II as a member of the London Fire Service; and the theme of fire and firefighting has run, often in a suggestively symbolic fashion, through much of his work, from his first volume of short stories, FIREMAN FLOWER, *to this, his first appearance in any fantasy magazine. Eudora Welty has described his work as "stories of compelling imagination and intensity"; I think you'll agree as you read this forceful narrative of a terrible circus of the future.*

The Tournament

by WILLIAM SANSOM

HIGH ABOVE THE ARENA HUGE bronze banners swayed in the light wind. Now and again they quivered as vibrations from the seven wurlitzers flowed up and down their sides, lightly touching them to brazen gooseflesh with a million electric finger tips.

The peoples of the world sat row upon row up the chromium tiers, ever higher, until the highest could only take their bird's-eye view of the contest through the standard glass magnifying screens. The peoples sat in groups of race, nation and community. All nearest the arena were gravely apprehensive of the contest's outcome; but, as the tiers rose further away, faces reflected a progressive smile until on the furthest tiers — whither had filtered many of the nearer people's leaders — there were scenes of song and mad picnicking.

These furthest people scarcely heard the furious noise thrown out by a network of giant megaphones that sprouted like ebony toadstools among the nearer crowd. The power of these giants was such that several men and women had already been sucked away into them by the intake of the announcers' breath. Now they were booming:

". . . IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEST, FOR THE CHAMPIONSHIP OF THIS WORLD . . . ON MY WEST — THE BLACK TANK!"

At this moment the western gates of the arena slid open and an immense tank scuttled into the arena. a quarter way across it braked to a dead stop, flinging up clouds of the metal dust that served for sand.

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The tank was painted a dull, heavy black. Now from the open gate came running ten black figures. They wore black rubber suits and jackboots. Their tall crash-helmets likened them to big-headed ants prancing upright. They ranged themselves in a close rank behind the tank.

As these men entered, a long cheer went up from the crowd; yet few people smiled. When the cheer at last died down the megaphones continued:

". . . AND ON MY EAST, the red engine!"

Curiously, the last words sounded soft, far away. It seemed almost as if the power had been turned down. Nevertheless the crowd gave a great cheer. But this was unfortunately cut short as the megaphones hurriedly continued to announce the details of the contest.

On the words *red engine*, the east gates opened and a scarlet fire engine drove in to a fine clatter of bells. It was an unusual machine, lightly armoured, with a large water monitor positioned on a central turret. As it braked — also a quarter way across the arena — its team of ten men filed in at the double from the gate. Eight of these men wore polished brass helmets, blue jackets, and high leather water-leggings. The remaining two, the outriders, were encased in white asbestos suits. With their wide square helmets and their great blunt boots they might have been divers — deep snow divers. They ranged themselves in open rank behind the fire-engine.

Meanwhile the megaphones continued: "AN ELEMENTAL DUEL BETWEEN FIRE AND WATER! THE BLACK TANK A FLAME-THROWER — THE RED ENGINE DELIVERING JETS OF FOAM. WITH THESE TWO WEAPONS ALONE THE COMBATANTS WILL ENGAGE. NO OTHER TACTIC OUTSIDE THE PLAIN ENGAGEMENT OF FIRE AND WATER WILL BE COUNTENANCED. THIS IS THE RULE.

"COMBAT COMMENCES ON THE SOUNDING OF THE SIREN. THERE WILL BE NEITHER ROUND NOR RESPITE. THIS IS A FIGHT TO THE DEATH. THE BLACK TANK, THE BLACK TANK VERSUS THE RED ENGINE."

Down in the arena the teams climbed into their machines. Now just the tank and the armoured fire engine faced each other, hostile insects on a vast field of metal dust. No life. Except for the fire outriders, poised and motionless as gargoyles. The mighty steam wurlitzers sobbed out huge music in a crescendo that seemed to stretch the waiting air to bursting point. Hymns were sung. Anthems resounded in the concrete bays. Men and women sang gravely, but soon a light of hysteria began to fire their eyes. Both suspense and sound were not long to be borne. Up aloft, as though scolded by a violent wind, the bronze banners thrashed. Then, above the magma of sound, a sudden high note froze the air — the rapier whine of the sirens. The fight was on.

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The symphony of wurlitzers and megaphones ceased. There was silence as the two machines burst into action. Then the tank roared its open engine, shattered the air with the planking and grinding of heavy steel caterpillars. The red engine was quieter, running on thick rubber tyres: only its bell clanged.

The two machines looked remarkably like insects as they darted towards each other. With tractors, the tank seemed to scuttle — a dangerous, unreal motion. The fire engine moved more like a beetle, with directional legs. The tank took the initiative. It was the more offensive in character. It scuttled towards the red engine, paused, veered in a sudden half-inch, and then came roaring in on the flank. As it entered range, a long feather of fire spat from its turret. It looked like a pole of liquid, gradually feathering out as it lost impetus. The flame tore straight at the red engine, greedy as a bullet. But simultaneously there spun out from the red engine's monitor a similar searching feather. At first it looked like white fire; but there was a subtle, tactile difference. This stuff was waterous, clouded, heavy; it flecked, like a snowstorm. It was chemical foam, directed under pressure from the snub muzzle of the monitor.

The two jets met midway, converged, and died in a mushroom of black smoke. A few flecks of white spindrift spattered the dull steel of the tank; one or two drops of liquid fire blistered the engine's red paint. The two machines roared past each other and away.

The tank slewed round and scuttled in again to the attack. This time it took a zigzag course. The fire engine sat still. The monitor muzzle followed the tank's course as if it were magnetically controlled. Then the flame again. This time it lobbed up, howitzer fashion. But the foam caught it in mid-air. And then the two elements stayed grappling in a grip of smoke as the machines circled. So steady was this circular movement, so rigid the fire, that the black smoke seemed a pivot forcing the machines round.

Up on the tiers the megaphones had begun a commentary. For an impartial body, they seemed strangely biased in favour of the black tank. At the same time they made marked mention of the red engine's tenacity. Tenacity — that bouquet so readily thrown by victor to vanquished, that famous escape of the uninitiative. Meanwhile the megaphones blared with hardly concealed enthusiasm of the daring curvets, flankings, feints and headlong onslaughts of the great black tank. Once the megaphone suggested, subtly, that the crowd should cry out for the black tank. Hypnotised, the crowd responded. Their applause became rhythmic. Like a steam piston gathering momentum, there evolved a concerted collegiate "Rah! Rah! Rah!" The colleges of the nations swayed and shouted.

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Among them was a man called Leftbridge. He was any man. He stood on the second tier. His shabby grey trilby bobbed up and down to the rhythm of the rah; his polished boots drummed the concrete; his eyes, normally misted and pale, shone with excited brilliance; even his tired, sandy moustache took on regular form as the mouth beneath piped its energetic "rahs." Mr. Leftbridge was enjoying himself. He had come to the arena with no special favourite in mind. Really, no one had ever asked him before to think about such things. He had always left world championships to the leaders. "They" knew what they were doing. At the back of his mind he had a vague partiality for the fire engine. It symbolised his vague principles, his tradition. But now, under the excited tutelage of the megaphones, he began to favour the black tank. He was dazzled by its compact efficiency. "They know what they want, those fellows," he said to himself. "I like a man to go after what he wants." Mr. Leftbridge had never gone after what he wanted. He had never had the courage. But it was a sweet dream of his, dreamed since his schoolday reading of Dick Daring and the pirates and the desert islands. In his middle age, he realised these ambitions by projecting them into other men, and admired them from afar, self-contented at second hand. He felt he could have done the same, given the time. Mr. Leftbridge stamped his feet and shouted "Rah! Rah! Rah! That's the stuff to give 'em!"

Down in the arena the tank disengaged itself and scuttled off to the west gate. The red engine followed, but slowed down as it observed the tank's turret opening. Two men climbed out and limped towards the gate. The red engine braked, prepared to give the tank breathing space until its injured crew should be replaced. But just then the turret snapped tight, and at full speed the tank charged. The red engine was caught off guard. Flame caught it full on the flank, ripping off the red paint in long blisters, searing in through every vantage hole. This all happened in a second — then the tank was past and away. One side of the red engine smoked black and blistered. One of the outriders had dropped, shrivelled with the heat. There must have been some casualties inside: nevertheless, the machine swung round and accelerated in pursuit of the tank. The engine was essentially a defensive appliance, but if it introduced enough foam into the tank the crew would evacuate to avoid drowning.

"Rah! Rah! Rah!" went the crowd and Mr. Leftbridge waved his trilby exultantly. Really, this was fine! What a splendid manœuvre! What cunning, what strength of purpose! At first he had felt uneasily that there was something not quite honourable in the trick. But the megaphones' enthusiasm had

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soon reassured him. With greater fervour he piped out his "Rahs!" The rhythm exhilarated him. He was delighting in being led. It was a rest for his initiative. Being led, he was protected from his conscience.

He looked round and saw the rest of the great crowd waving and stamping and shouting. He laughed aloud. There they were — thousands of people, "Raking" for the Black Tank! Fine! And he was one of them! This was a loving freemasonry. It was comforting to know that every manjack of the crowd would approve of him. A common bond — for the first time he felt he could go up to any man and shake him by the hand, no longer timorous of the stranger's reaction. At last he was certain. Now the wurlitzers played a march. Mr. Leftbridge began to sing at the top of his voice.

The tanks and the engine were at grips again. The two interlaced jets, red and white, swayed and swivelled for advantage. Sometimes the machines ranged the entire length of the arena, flank to flank. Sometimes one or other stopped dead, firing at its enemy's tail. Sometimes they closed in and braked; then their swivelling turrets alone continued the duel. This was the most fearsome sight of all. It brought to mind the motion of hostile ants duelling softly with slowly waving antennae.

Thus the combat continued for nearly an hour — until the tank suddenly introduced a new tactic. From a wide periphery it charged full out at the red engine. Its flame thrower was withdrawn, all hatches tightly closed. It seemed intent on ramming. Only at five yards did it brake from maximum speed. Then it swung round sharply. It came skidding flank on — until its black hull all but grazed the scorched armour of the engine. Then it reversed, then it flew forwards, reversed, flew forwards — all within two lengths of itself. As its grinding tractors champed and worried the ground, a great cloud of metal dust rose to bury the red engine. For a few seconds both machines were lost in cloud. Then out scuttled the tank, drenched in foam and dust. Halting in the open, it raised its shutters, slewed round, and threw out its flame-throwing muzzle for the attack.

The cloud of metal dust subsided. The red engine was grey, coated thickly with grit. The grit had blown right in everywhere. Through the open shutters, heaping into the monitor's muzzle, blinding the eyes of the crew, clogging the well-oiled mechanism. The engine spluttered, tried vainly to start. The black tank charged. Flame seared along its path. Then — the tank made a mistake. It braked, and prepared to burn out the engine at its leisure. One of the engine's outriders, protected from the dust by his white asbestos casing, leapt off his platform and sprinted towards the tank. Just as the flame spurted, he jumped

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up at the black turret — and thrust his body over the flame thrower's muzzle. He locked his arms round the muzzle and lay there to die. The red engine now had time to clear away the dust.

Up on the tiers the megaphones seemed to have forgotten the rules they had so recently declaimed: "NO OTHER TACTIC BUT THE PLAIN ENGAGEMENT OF FIRE AND WATER WILL BE COUNTENANCED." That was what they had said. But now — now magically their tone was transposed! "A MOST BRILLIANT MANOEUVRE ON THE PART OF THE BLACK! . . . DID YOU SEE IT? WHAT DARING, WHAT TANKMANSHIP! BY LUCK THE ENEMY HAS MANAGED TO COUNTER THE BLOW — BUT AT GREAT EXPENSE! THREE CHEERS NOW FOR THE INVINCIBLE BLACK!"

Mr. Leftbridge opened his mouth to cheer. His "Rah" began firm — and then faltering slower, slower, deeper, deeper, like a gramophone record running down. In that second, Mr. Leftbridge doubted. This time he was more than uneasy about the possibility of a dishonourable trick. This time he knew in his neatly polished boots that the tank was fouling. The magic of the megaphones paled. Uncertain of his neighbours, he continued to shape "Rahs" with his mouth as he turned to look along the tier. He noticed that several other people seemed embarrassed — they coughed, fiddled with their hats, glanced quickly at their boots. The volume of cheering diminished. Mr. Leftbridge began to feel indignant.

The megaphones turned on the power. This time they abandoned any pretence at all.

". . . HELLO! WHAT'S THIS . . . NOT CHEERING? COME, YOU CAN DO BETTER THAN THAT! NOW, PLEASE, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, ALL TOGETHER . . . A REAL ROUSER . . . READY? THEN RAH! RAH! RAH! RAH! . . ."

Gradually the people began cheering again. High voltage and easy rhetoric took charge of their senses with fluent ease. The little indignation died. Soon Mr. Leftbridge felt the old excitement flexing the muscles of his face again.

In the arena there was a short pause for refuelling. This was accomplished at lightning speed by mobile tenders. But since the fire engine had to take aboard an exceptionally large load of water, the tank was fully charged and prepared for combat much the earlier.

The incredible happened. Disobeying all the rules of the international games, openly flaunting one of society's most elementary ethics, the tank attacked while the red engine's mechanism was still dismantled. Tied to the tender by hose-pipes, its armour raised, the red engine was immobilised and exceptionally vulnerable. There was no scuttling in the tank's movement now. It came charging across the metal dust like a bull. From the tiers, a minute black bull with head

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lowered in blind fury, pounding across those metal grey sands. As it drew within range, the long vermilion feather sprayed from its turret, washing the waiting engine. There was nothing the firemen could do.

But up on the tiers the cheering had suddenly ceased: in its place, a moment's silence, then a long sob of horror. Vainly the megaphones boomed. But this time the people were free. They had tolerated, they had been deceived by everything but this ultimate treachery. It was too gross a shock for their human hearts. Not all the most cunningly devised propaganda, nor the greatest psychological deceptions, nor the projections of the greatest power houses in the world could set the lie to so deep an intuition of evil.

Mr. Leftbridge jumped from his seat, vaulted a rail, sprinted down the concrete gangway towards the arena. He held no set ideas in his head. He was impelled simply by an intuitive urge to "get at" the Black Tank. Others followed him. The gangway struggled with people.

Flame seared the sides of the red engine. The crew had managed to lower the armour plating that covered the main mechanism. But the fire still tore in through every opening. Now they abandoned the machine. But as they jumped clear, they held in their hands the nozzles of hoses. And as they ran clear, white snakes flaked out behind them. There were only six of them. They ran with their hoses in a wide circle round the tank. The hose lengths spewed out like the tentacles of an octopus. Then the foam came on. Six white poles shot out at the tank.

There was an answer. The flame-thrower swung round and swept at them. It swept at them horizontally as a garden brush sweeps at leaves. One by one the firemen shrivelled and dropped.

But now the crowd was in the arena. As the firemen fell, men and women grabbed the nozzles and kept the foam pouring straight. Again and again the turret circled, burning and shrivelling its enemies. But as they fell, new hands took on the job. There was no end to those new hands.

And ever the circle closed in.

The tank was now a little hill of foam. The flame-thrower hardly broke the veil of heavy suds. Soon it faltered and died. Somewhere inside the hill, a hatch opened, and the black crew leapt free. They scrambled wildly to escape drowning. They were arrested and taken away.

The tank was left in the centre of the arena to rust forever. . . .

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I'll let Mack Reynolds write his own introduction on this one. "I pass this on," he says, "as it was told to me, making no claims. All I know is that since meeting this guy the additional gobbledygook I've picked up makes my stories go like crazy. It has such an authentic *sound that the science fiction editors can't resist." For evidence, see future issues of F&SF.*

The Expert

by MACK REYNOLDS

He was about five foot four, would go perhaps a hundred and fifteen pounds after being caught out in the rain, and wore a lost pup expression. His scrawny beard gave the impression that moths made a custom of bedding down in it.

"I'll be glad to have a drink with you," I answered. "Celebrating something?"

He shook his head. "Not exactly. I'm drowning my sorrows."

I held out my hand to be shaken. "Larry Marshall," I said.

He shook it. "Newton Brown. My friends call me Newt."

"So," I said, "you've got sorrows too."

"You mean I've met a kindred spirit; that you also entered this oasis to seek solace in the cup?"

"You have said it," I told him, ignoring the fruity language. "Listen," I hurried into a description of my troubles before he had time to launch his own. "It's this managing editor. I wanted to be sent over to the Paris office, see? A change of scene. But do you think he'd assign me to —"

"You think you have troubles," he interrupted sadly, "but look at this." He handed me a slip of yellow paper.

"As I was saying about this publisher . . ." I went on, taking the paper uninterestedly, ". . . Jumping Jeeps! Ten thousand potatoes!" It was a check from the Associated Towel Manufacturers of America.

"It's always like that," he complained. "Something always happens to my work, it never reaches the public. I can't afford not to take this check and obviously now they'll suppress it."

"Who'll suppress what?" I asked, still staring at all that green stuff represented on one piece of paper.

"The Associated Towel Manu-

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facturers," he sighed. "They've just bought up my dry water discovery."

I said uneasily, "Your what?"

"Dry water," he repeated. "Endless possibilities, obviously. Absolutely revolutionize irrigation. Carry it around in burlap bags. I stumbled on the idea when experimenting with *light* water. I'm a research scientist, you know." He added sadly, "Quite a genius."

I couldn't stop now. "What did you figure *light* water would do?"

"You've heard of *heavy* water, obviously. Well, I concluded that if I could devise a *light* water it would revolutionize reducing and end obesity overnight." For a moment the little man seemed inspired by his dream; his eyes brightened.

"I . . . I don't believe I get you," I said.

"Obvious," he said. "You must know that at least ninety per cent of the human body is composed of water. Well, if I could substitute *light* water for regular H_2O in a person's chemical make-up, they'd weigh considerably less. Simple, isn't it?"

For a brief moment I let my brain consider some of the ramifications. Then I shook my head for clarity.

"Not exactly," I told him, beginning to need that drink he'd offered me. "But what happened to your light water experiments?"

He sighed again. "The government suppressed them."

"The government?"

Newton Brown nodded. "As you undoubtedly know, heavy water is extremely important in nuclear fission. Well . . . it's obvious, isn't it? One experiment leads to another and I was beginning to dabble in reverse nuclear fission with my light water when they clamped down."

I started to say, "Reverse nuc —" but he held up a silencing hand.

"Sorry, Larry. I've given my word not to discuss it. The subject is *highly classified*, as the Pentagon puts it."

"Okay," I said, "but listen, Newt, how come you don't get away from water? First it's light water, then it's dry water; you're in a rut."

He stuffed the check back into a pocket and sighed. "The compound has always fascinated me. There should be *some* sensible use for it — obviously it's a flop as a beverage."

Newton Brown banged his hand on the bar to attract Sam's attention, adding to me, "I shall be glad to provide the means with which to drown our sorrows. I hate to drink alone, you know, but usually no one will indulge with me — not even bar flies. After a few moments they complain of headache."

I said, possibly ambiguously, "I'm a newspaperman."

Sam had come up and Newton Brown said, "Two John Brown's Bodies, please."

Sam looked at him unbelievingly. "What, again?" he objected, "and this time of day?"

I said suspiciously, "What does a John Brown's Body do?"

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Sam growled, "Tomorrow morning you'll feel like you're moldering in your grave."

Newt said, "No argument, Sam. Two John Brown's Bodies, the obvious potation when one is drowning one's sorrows."

The drinks came in the tallest glasses I've ever seen. I sipped mine carefully. "Jumping Jeeps!" I sputtered.

Newton Brown beamed. "Good, aren't they? I named the concoction after an ancestor. The principal ingredients are an egg, rum, absinthe, metaxa and pulque."

"Pulque?"

"Pulque," he repeated. "Obviously, Sam didn't have any so I had to send to Mexico for a supply. Then there is . . ."

"Don't tell me," I shuddered. I peered down into the glass. "I seem to see a fragment of eggshell."

"Is that so? It's usually dissolved by this time. But to get back to you, Larry: what's this about your editor?"

I took a gulp of my drink. "He's a heel. Right now, the way I feel, I wish I could pull out of the newspaper racket. The trouble is, it's all I know, been at it ever since I got out of high school. I couldn't make a living at anything else, Newt."

Newton Brown took another pull at the liquid H-Bomb and I did the same.

After we'd recovered he scratched his beard reflectively and said, "Have you considered my super-cerebrograph?" Before I could answer, he went on, "No, I guess you couldn't have. I haven't told you about it."

I took another deep gulp to steel myself. "Come again," I said.

"Can't really claim it for my own," he said modestly. "I picked it up during the experiments with my time machine."

I chuckled in sympathy. "A time machine, yet. Working on that must have been discouraging."

"It certainly was. As I say, over and over they buy up and suppress my best devices." He took another heavy slug of John Brown's Body. "That confounded International Historian's Guild."

I said, "I missed something there."

"Bought it up. Suppressed it!" He was bitter.

"You mean . . . ? Well . . . *why?*"

He shrugged narrow shoulders, motioned to Sam for two more of the same. "It was driving them frantic, obviously. Among other things I proved that Columbus never discovered America. Never even saw the sea. As a matter of fact, he spent his whole life running a tailor shop in Genoa."

I was asking for it, but I couldn't help myself. "Well, who *did* discover America?"

"Greek chap by the name of Popadopolous. Later he opened a restaurant in Cuba. And that's not all. You've heard of Napoleon, obviously. Well . . ."

"Look," I said desperately. "This

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Super-Duper-Graph. Let's get back to that."

He explained in an offhand manner. "You've heard of the cerebrograph, the method of teaching a subject while the student is asleep? The idea is that you have a small earphone on all night and, while you sleep, a phonograph plays over and over again the subject you want to learn. By morning, you know it."

"What's all this got to do with my ditching the newspaper racket?" I asked, finishing my drink.

Newton Brown motioned for Sam to bring two more.

Sam shook his head sorrowfully and said, "I oughta hang a sign over the bar, *Only One-Half A John Brown's Body To A Customer.*"

Newt ignored Sam and said to me, "Obvious. My advanced type of cerebrograph would fit you immediately for another position. You see it involves hypnosis, stimulation of the pineal gland, extra-sensory perception and a high-speed automatic-change phonograph. The hypnosis quickens the receptivity of your subconscious. Overnight, you would have the equivalent of a lifetime's study on the subject we selected."

I stared at him and took a gulp of the new drink Sam brought. "You mean that in one night you could teach me all I'd have to know to be . . . well, say, a plumber or a bricklayer or something?"

His thin shoulders rose and fell. "Or for that matter an expert on preparing spices for Egyptian embalming — picked that material up with the time machine. You go to bed in a hypnotic trance with my series of recordings playing in your ear. In the morning the whole conglomeration is so deeply ensconced in your mind that it is as though you have known it all your life."

"Ensconced?" I said.

"Ensconced," he repeated definitely, while waving two fingers at Sam in the way of ordering refills. "All you have to do is go out and apply for your new job. You can tell them you've had twenty years of experience."

I took another deep draught. Already I could feel the fog rolling in. "That I'd like to see," I told him.

"Well, sir," he said. "I have records done up for scores of professions and it would be a simple matter to cut others. It's a matter of taking your pick."

"Sumshing different," I slurred. "Shumsing u-u-u . . ."

"Unique, eh?" He swayed thoughtfully on his stool.

Sam came with the refills.

When the fog rolled out in the morning, I opened one eye carefully, then the other. Sure enough, I felt like I was moldering in my grave. I could hear a fast-speaking squeaky voice blabbing something to the effect of ". . . following burnout of the third booster. At this point, if monatomic hydrogen is being utilized, there will be a theoretical ex-

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haust velocity of 21,000 meters a second, where ordinary hydrogen has a theoretical exhaust velocity of but 5,170 meters per second. The difference, however . . ."

"A radio," I groaned. "That's all I need. Why don't they tax those things?"

The voice stopped and I heard a click and a clatter. I opened my eyes wider. It wasn't a radio, it was an automatic phonograph next to my bed. I sat up and shut it off, groaning. It was a queer looking arrangement: evidently, when all the records had played, it was so constructed as to start them all over again.

I shook my head. Somehow or other, the thing should have had some significance to me, I thought. It didn't.

I got to my feet and looked around. Through the open door to my tiny combination living-room-dining-room-kitchen, I could see a bearded, ragdoll-like figure sprawled on the couch. I tried to remember. "Newton Brown," I said finally. "A crackpot inventor at Sam's Bar."

He opened one eye. "Don't shout at me," he complained.

"I hardly whispered."

"It sounds like shouting." He opened the other eye. "Who are you?"

I made my way first to the sink and let the water run cold before taking a deep drink. Then I stuck my head under the faucet and let it drench me.

"Ah, wonderful," I groaned.

After I'd dried myself, I said, "I'm Larry Marshall. We met last night at Sam's and drank John Brown's Bodies. I don't remember coming here. What's that phonograph doing next to my bed?"

"Phonograph?" His hangover made him look more woebegone than ever.

"Sitting on a coffee table next to my bed."

He squinted up at me, scratching his whiskers, slowly bleeding to death through his eyes. He said finally, "It sounds like my super-cerebrograph."

I snapped my fingers. "I remember now. I said I wanted to get out of the newspaper racket and you said you could train me for another job overnight. It didn't work. I wonder where the hell I left the aspirin."

He slid his feet around and onto the floor and essayed getting erect. "What didn't work? If you find them let me have two."

"This super-duper-phonograph thing. Do you think we can keep even aspirin down? It didn't train me for a new job."

"Listen," he said, "let's talk about one thing at a time. My headache is getting worse and I'm not sure it's just the hangover. How do you know it didn't?"

"Well, what did it train me for?" I said. "I feel exactly the same." The aspirin were in the kitchen cabinet. I shook three of them out, got

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another cold glass of water, and washed them down. "Except for this hangover, of course." I handed him the bottle of pills.

After he'd taken a dose he said, "I'll get the records and we'll see what it was we taught you last night." He made his way cautiously, one hand against the wall, the other on his forehead, to my bedroom.

I could hear him fussing with the machine, then, seconds later, I winced at a tremendous crash.

He staggered back into the living room. "I broke them," he confessed.

I eased myself down on the couch he had just vacated. "I wondered what that noise could possibly be," I said bitterly. I tried to focus on my wristwatch. "Jumping Jeeps, I'll have to get to work; my editor'll ring my neck."

He lowered himself into the easy chair with a groan. "Forget about that," he said. "You have a new profession now, obviously."

I snorted at him. "Yeah? But until I find out what it is, don't you think it just might be a good idea to make my bread and butter the old way?"

Newton Brown shook his head. "I'm afraid that's out. Didn't I inform you that not only does my super-cerebrograph fit you for a new profession but it even wipes out the memory of the now useless knowledge of the old one? Obviously, you wouldn't want to clutter up your mind with unnecessary data."

I bug-eyed at him. "Are you around the corner? You have the gall to tell me I don't remember anything about the newspaper business just because you played your crackpot records in my ear all night?"

He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes painfully. "*Please*, don't shout. Try typing, for instance."

Still glaring at him, I weaved my way over to the old Underwood I keep on the desk. I sat down before it and reached out shakily for the keys. I blinked at them, drew my hands back and then reached again.

"You put paper in it first," he said from behind me. "It's obvious that whatever your new profession is, it doesn't include need for the use of the typewriter."

I swung around at him, the full significance of the situation beginning to hit me. "You mean . . . you mean this screwy idea of yours really *works*? That you've knocked out of my head everything I knew about the newspaper business — even how to type copy?"

"Obviously. That's what you wanted, wasn't it? And now I've made you an expert in some other field."

"But *what?*" I wailed. "I don't remember anything I didn't know before."

In desperation I staggered into the kitchen and wrenched open a drawer where I keep my few tools and took out a hammer and a handful of nails. I began driving one into the

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wooden window ledge. Newton Brown winced when I missed the third swack, and shook his head sadly. "No, you didn't want to be a carpenter."

I grabbed the injured finger, then dashed for the bathroom. There had been a leaky faucet for weeks. I stared at it.

No good. I didn't have the vaguest idea of how to fix it.

"Not a plumber, either," I said desperately. Back to the kitchen. I grasped a skillet, got two eggs from the refrigerator. Both yolks broke when I cracked the shells.

Newton Brown had been watching me interestedly. "I doubt that you're a short-order cook," he said. "Among other things you forgot to put any grease into the pan."

Seizing a pencil and piece of paper, I began to draw.

He looked over my shoulder. "Nor an artist. Obviously, we didn't decide to make you an artist."

I said in desperation, "Maybe I'm a modernistic artist — you know, non-representational."

He rubbed his beard, looked over my shoulder again and shuddered at my sketch. "No," he said. "It doesn't even *non*-represent."

I threw my pencil down in despair. "This isn't any good," I complained. "It might take me a month to find out what I am now."

He considered that. "You're right. Maybe longer. I kept no record of the various professions I recorded and there was a multitude of them. We'll have to devise some method of discovering just what you are. Let's see: as I recall you demanded something unique. For all we know, you might be a pretzel-bending expert."

"Maybe I'm a wine taster," I said hopefully, "or a *Totsaufer*."

He closed his eyes in deep thought. "There must be some clue. What were we talking about last night?"

I snapped my fingers. "We were talking about that drink of yours. Maybe we decided I ought to be a bartender."

He said, "How do you make a Pink Lady?"

"You think I want McCarthy after me? I stick to one hundred per cent American girls."

He shook his head. "No. You're not a bartender. What else did we talk about?"

I held my hands over my throbbing temples. "We talked about everything. Dry water and light water. All kinds of water but black water."

In spite of his hangover, he was interested. "Black water . . . Its possible advantageousness seems to elude me."

"Maybe for people who don't care if they're dirty or not to wash with," I said bitterly.

"Please," he said. "My head. How long does it take for aspirin to work? What else did we talk about? There must be *some* clue."

"Let's try two more apiece," I said. "We talked about suppressing your inventions. And Columbus run-

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ning a tailor shop and the International Historian's Guild, or some such, suppressing your time machine. And . . ."

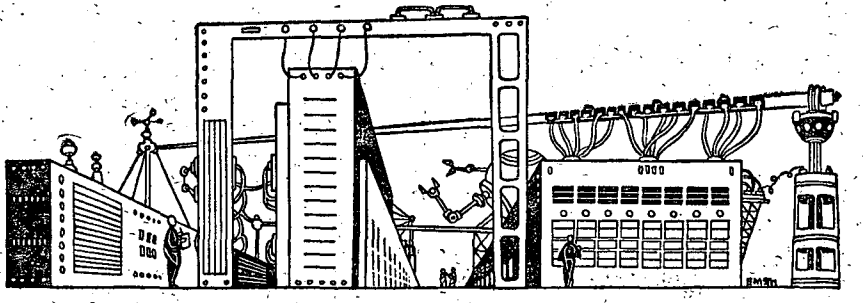
"Oh, oh," he said, avoiding my eyes. "Maybe we better try those additional aspirin. I have a premonition . . ." The sentence dribbled off.

"What's wrong with you?" I snapped.

"The time machine," he said. "You wanted some unique profession."

I could see it coming. "Oh, no," I protested.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *If I can only keep this guy under wraps, prevent Willy Ley or Arthur C. Clarke from getting their hooks in him, my fortune is made. I tell you, since meeting him, my stuff has the ring of authenticity. I'm the only writer in the field who knows a man whose profession is the repairing of an intergalactical hyperdrive.* — MACK REYNOLDS



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I don't know a better writer of unexpected and unclassifiable fiction than Shirley Jackson, who offers us this time a story as delightfully unconventional as its title.

One Ordinary Day, With Peanuts

by SHIRLEY JACKSON

MR. JOHN PHILIP JOHNSON SHUT his front door behind him and came down his front steps into the bright morning with a feeling that all was well with the world on this best of all days, and wasn't the sun warm and good, and didn't his shoes feel comfortable after the resoling, and he knew that he had undoubtedly chosen the precise very tie which belonged with the day and the sun and his comfortable feet, and, after all, wasn't the world just a wonderful place? In spite of the fact that he was a small man, and the tie was perhaps a shade vivid, Mr. Johnson irradiated this feeling of well-being as he came down the steps and onto the dirty sidewalk, and he smiled at people who passed him, and some of them even smiled back. He stopped at the newsstand on the corner and bought his paper, saying "*Good* morning" with real conviction to the man who sold him the paper and the two or three other people who were lucky enough to be buying papers when Mr. Johnson skipped up. He remembered to fill his pockets with candy and peanuts, and then he set out to get himself uptown. He stopped in a flower shop and bought a carnation for his buttonhole, and stopped almost immediately afterward to give the carnation to a small child in a carriage, who looked at him dumbly, and then smiled, and Mr. Johnson smiled, and the child's mother looked at Mr. Johnson for a minute and then smiled too.

When he had gone several blocks uptown, Mr. Johnson cut across the avenue and went along a side street, chosen at random; he did not follow the same route every morning, but preferred to pursue his eventful way in wide detours, more like a puppy than a man intent upon business. It happened this morning that halfway down the block a moving van was parked, and the furniture from an upstairs apartment stood half on the sidewalk, half on the steps, while an amused group of people loitered, examining the scratches on the tables and the worn spots on the chairs, and

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a harassed woman, trying to watch a young child and the movers and the furniture all at the same time, gave the clear impression of endeavoring to shelter her private life from the people staring at her belongings. Mr. Johnson stopped, and for a moment joined the crowd, and then he came forward and, touching his hat civilly, said, "Perhaps I can keep an eye on your little boy for you?"

The woman turned and glared at him distrustfully, and Mr. Johnson added hastily, "We'll sit right here on the steps." He beckoned to the little boy, who hesitated and then responded agreeably to Mr. Johnson's genial smile. Mr. Johnson brought out a handful of peanuts from his pocket and sat on the steps with the boy, who at first refused the peanuts on the grounds that his mother did not allow him to accept food from strangers; Mr. Johnson said that probably his mother had not intended peanuts to be included, since elephants at the circus ate them, and the boy considered, and then agreed solemnly. They sat on the steps cracking peanuts in a comradely fashion, and Mr. Johnson said, "So you're moving?"

"Yep," said the boy.

"Where you going?"

"Vermont."

"Nice place. Plenty of snow there. Maple sugar, too; you like maple sugar?"

"Sure."

"Plenty of maple sugar in Vermont. You going to live on a farm?"

"Going to live with Grandpa."

"Grandpa like peanuts?"

"Sure."

"Ought to take him some," said Mr. Johnson, reaching into his pocket. "Just you and Mommy going?"

"Yep."

"Tell you what," Mr. Johnson said. "You take some peanuts to eat on the train."

The boy's mother, after glancing at them frequently, had seemingly decided that Mr. Johnson was trustworthy; because she had devoted herself wholeheartedly to seeing that the movers did not — what movers rarely do, but every housewife believes they will — crack a leg from her good table, or set a kitchen chair down on a lamp. Most of the furniture was loaded by now, and she was deep in that nervous stage when she knew there was something she had forgotten to pack — hidden away in the back of a closet somewhere, or left at a neighbor's and forgotten, or on the clothesline — and was trying to remember under stress what it was.

"This all, lady?" the chief mover said, completing her dismay.

Uncertainly, she nodded.

"Want to go on the truck with the furniture, sonny?" the mover asked the boy, and laughed. The boy laughed too and said to Mr. Johnson, "I guess I'll have a good time at Vermont."

"Fine time," said Mr. Johnson, and stood up. "Have one more pea-

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nut before you go," he said to the boy.

The boy's mother said to Mr. Johnson, "Thank you so much; it was a great help to me."

"Nothing at all," said Mr. Johnson gallantly. "Where in Vermont are you going?"

The mother looked at the little boy accusingly, as though he had given away a secret of some importance, and said unwillingly, "Greenwich."

"Lovely town," said Mr. Johnson. He took out a card, and wrote a name on the back. "Very good friend of mine lives in Greenwich," he said. "Call on him for anything you need. His wife makes the best doughnuts in town," he added soberly to the little boy.

"Swell," said the little boy.

"Goodbye," said Mr. Johnson.

He went on, stepping happily with his new-shod feet, feeling the warm sun on his back and on the top of his head. Halfway down the block he met a stray dog and fed him a peanut.

At the corner, where another wide avenue faced him, Mr. Johnson decided to go on uptown again. Moving with comparative laziness, he was passed on either side by people hurrying and frowning, and people brushed past him going the other way, clattering along to get somewhere quickly. Mr. Johnson stopped on every corner and waited patiently for the light to change, and he stepped out of the way of anyone who seemed to be in any particular hurry, but one young lady came too fast for him, and crashed wildly into him when he stooped to pat a kitten which had run out onto the sidewalk from an apartment house and was now unable to get back through the rushing feet.

"Excuse me," said the young lady, trying frantically to pick up Mr. Johnson and hurry on at the same time, "terribly sorry."

The kitten, regardless now of danger, raced back to its home; "Perfectly all right," said Mr. Johnson, adjusting himself carefully. "You seem to be in a hurry."

"Of course I'm in a hurry," said the young lady. "I'm late."

She was extremely cross and the frown between her eyes seemed well on its way to becoming permanent. She had obviously awakened late, because she had not spent any extra time in making herself look pretty, and her dress was plain and unadorned with collar or brooch, and her lipstick was noticeably crooked. She tried to brush past Mr. Johnson, but, risking her suspicious displeasure, he took her arm and said, "Please wait."

"Look," she said ominously, "I ran into you and your lawyer can see my lawyer and I will gladly pay all damages and all inconveniences suffered therefrom but please this minute let me go because *I am late*."

"Late for what?" said Mr. Johnson; he tried his winning smile on

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her but it did no more than keep her, he suspected, from knocking him down again.

"Late for work," she said between her teeth. "Late for my employment. I have a job and if I am late I lose exactly so much an hour and I cannot really afford what your pleasant conversation is costing me, be it *ever* so pleasant."

"I'll pay for it," said Mr. Johnson. Now these were magic words, not necessarily because they were true, or because she seriously expected Mr. Johnson to pay for anything, but because Mr. Johnson's flat statement, obviously innocent of irony, could not be, coming from Mr. Johnson, anything but the statement of a responsible and truthful and respectable man.

"What *do* you mean?" she asked.

"I said that since I am obviously responsible for your being late I shall certainly pay for it."

"Don't be silly," she said, and for the first time the frown disappeared. "*I* wouldn't expect you to pay for anything — a few minutes ago I was offering to pay *you*. Anyway," she added, almost smiling, "it *was* my fault."

"What happens if you don't go to work?"

She stared. "I don't get paid."

"Precisely," said Mr. Johnson.

"What do you mean, precisely? If I don't show up at the office exactly twenty minutes ago I lose a dollar and twenty cents an hour, or two cents a minute or . . ." She thought. ". . . Almost a dime for the time I've spent talking to you."

Mr. Johnson laughed, and finally she laughed, too. "You're late already," he pointed out. "Will you give me another four cents worth?"

"I don't understand why."

"You'll see," Mr. Johnson promised. He led her over to the side of the walk, next to the buildings, and said, "Stand here," and went out into the rush of people going both ways. Selecting and considering, as one who must make a choice involving perhaps whole years of lives, he estimated the people going by. Once he almost moved, and then at the last minute thought better of it and drew back. Finally, from half a block away, he saw what he wanted, and moved out into the center of the traffic to intercept a young man, who was hurrying, and dressed as though he had awakened late, and frowning.

"Oof," said the young man, because Mr. Johnson had thought of no better way to intercept anyone than the one the young woman had unwittingly used upon him. "Where do you think you're going?" the young man demanded from the sidewalk.

"I want to speak to you," said Mr. Johnson ominously.

The young man got up nervously, dusting himself and eying Mr. Johnson. "What for?" he said. "What'd *I* do?"

"That's what bothers me most about people nowadays," Mr. John-

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son complained broadly to the people passing. "No matter whether they've done anything or not, they always figure someone's after them. About what you're going to do," he told the young man.

"Listen," said the young man, trying to brush past him, "I'm late, and I don't have any time to listen. Here's a dime, now get going."

"Thank you," said Mr. Johnson, pocketing the dime. "Look," he said, "what happens if you stop running?"

"I'm late," said the young man, still trying to get past Mr. Johnson, who was unexpectedly clinging.

"How much you make an hour?" Mr. Johnson demanded.

"A communist, are you?" said the young man. "Now will you please let me —"

"No," said Mr. Johnson insistently, "*how* much?"

"Dollar fifty," said the young man. "And *now* will you —"

"You like adventure?"

The young man stared, and, staring, found himself caught and held by Mr. Johnson's genial smile; he almost smiled back and then repressed it and made an effort to tear away. "I got to *hurry*," he said.

"Mystery? Like surprises? Unusual and exciting events?"

"You selling something?"

"Sure," said Mr. Johnson. "You want to take a chance?"

The young man hesitated, looked longingly up the avenue toward what might have been his destination and then, when Mr. Johnson said, "I'll pay for it," with his own peculiar convincing emphasis, turned and said, "Well, okay. But I got to *see* it first, what I'm buying."

Mr. Johnson, breathing hard, led the young man over to the side where the girl was standing; she had been watching with interest Mr. Johnson's capture of the young man and now, smiling timidly, she looked at Mr. Johnson as though prepared to be surprised at nothing. Mr. Johnson reached into his pocket and took out his wallet. "Here," he said, and handed a bill to the girl. "This about equals your day's pay."

"But no," she said, surprised in spite of herself. "I mean, I *couldn't*."

"Please do not interrupt," Mr. Johnson told her. "And *here*," he said to the young man, "this will take care of *you*." The young man accepted the bill dazedly, but said, "Probably counterfeit" to the young woman out of the side of his mouth. "Now," Mr. Johnson went on, disregarding the young man, "what is your name, miss?"

"Kent," she said helplessly. "Mildred Kent."

"Fine," said Mr. Johnson. "And you, sir?"

"Arthur Adams," said the young man stiffly.

"Splendid," said Mr. Johnson. "Now, Miss Kent, I would like you to meet Mr. Adams. Mr. Adams, Miss Kent."

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Miss Kent stared, wet her lips nervously, made a gesture as though she might run, and said, "How do you do?"

Mr. Adams straightened his shoulders, scowled at Mr. Johnson, made a gesture as though he might run, and said, "How do you do?"

"Now *this*," said Mr. Johnson, taking several bills from his wallet, "should be enough for the day for both of you. I would suggest, perhaps, Coney Island — although I personally am not fond of the place — or perhaps a nice lunch somewhere, and dancing, or a matinee, or even a movie, although take care to choose a really *good* one; there are *so* many bad movies these days. You might," he said, struck with an inspiration, "visit the Bronx Zoo, or the Planetarium. Anywhere, as a matter of fact," he concluded, "that you would like to go. Have a nice time."

As he started to move away Arthur Adams, breaking from his dumbfounded stare, said, "But see here, mister, you *can't* do this. Why — how do you know — I mean, *we* don't even know — I mean, how do you know we won't just take the money and not do what you said?"

"You've taken the money," Mr. Johnson said. "You don't have to follow any of my suggestions. You may know something you prefer to do — perhaps a museum, or something."

"But suppose I just run away with it and leave her here?"

"I know you won't," said Mr. Johnson gently, "because you remembered to ask *me* that. Goodbye," he added, and went on.

As he stepped up the street, conscious of the sun on his head and his good shoes, he heard from somewhere behind him the young man saying, "Look, you know you don't *have* to if you don't want to," and the girl saying, "But unless *you* don't want to . . . " Mr. Johnson smiled to himself and then thought that he had better hurry along; when he wanted to he could move very quickly, and before the young woman had gotten around to saying, "Well, *I* will if *you* will," Mr. Johnson was several blocks away and had already stopped twice, once to help a lady lift several large packages into a taxi and once to hand a peanut to a seagull. By this time he was in an area of large stores and many more people and he was buffeted constantly from either side by people hurrying and cross and late and sullen. Once he offered a peanut to a man who asked him for a dime, and once he offered a peanut to a bus driver who had stopped his bus at an intersection and had opened the window next to his seat and put out his head as though longing for fresh air and the comparative quiet of the traffic. The man wanting a dime took the peanut because Mr. Johnson had wrapped a dollar bill around it, but the bus driver took the peanut and asked ironically, "You want a transfer, Jack?"

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On a busy corner Mr. Johnson encountered two young people — for one minute he thought they might be Mildred Kent and Arthur Adams — who were eagerly scanning a newspaper, their backs pressed against a storefront to avoid the people passing; their heads bent together. Mr. Johnson, whose curiosity was insatiable, leaned onto the storefront next to them and peeked over the man's shoulder; they were scanning the "Apartments Vacant" columns.

Mr. Johnson remembered the street where the woman and her little boy were going to Vermont and he tapped the man on the shoulder and said amiably, "Try down on West Seventeen. About the middle of the block, people moved out this morning."

"Say, what do you —" said the man, and then, seeing Mr. Johnson clearly, "Well, thanks. Where did you say?"

"West Seventeen," said Mr. Johnson. "About the middle of the block." He smiled again and said, "Good luck."

"Thanks," said the man.

"Thanks," said the girl, as they moved off.

"Goodbye," said Mr. Johnson.

He lunched alone in a pleasant restaurant, where the food was rich, and only Mr. Johnson's excellent digestion could encompass two of their whipped-cream-and-chocolate-and-rum-cake pastries for dessert. He had three cups of coffee, tipped the waiter largely, and went out into the street again into the wonderful sunlight, his shoes still comfortable and fresh on his feet. Outside he found a beggar staring into the windows of the restaurant he had left and, carefully looking through the money in his pocket, Mr. Johnson approached the beggar and pressed some coins and a couple of bills into his hand. "It's the price of the veal cutlet lunch plus tip," said Mr. Johnson. "Goodby."

After his lunch he rested; he walked into the nearest park and fed peanuts to the pigeons. It was late afternoon by the time he was ready to start back downtown, and he had refereed two checker games and watched a small boy and girl whose mother had fallen asleep and awakened with surprise and fear which turned to amusement when she saw Mr. Johnson. He had given away almost all of his candy, and had fed all the rest of his peanuts to the pigeons, and it was time to go home. Although the late afternoon sun was pleasant, and his shoes were still entirely comfortable, he decided to take a taxi downtown.

He had a difficult time catching a taxi, because he gave up the first three or four empty ones to people who seemed to need them more; finally, however, he stood alone on the corner and — almost like netting a frisky fish — he hailed desperately until he succeeded in catching a cab which had been proceeding with haste uptown and seemed to draw in

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towards Mr. Johnson against its own will.

"Mister," the cab driver said as Mr. Johnson climbed in, "I figured you was an omen, like. I wasn't going to pick you up at all."

"Kind of you," said Mr. Johnson anbiguously.

"If I'd of let you go it would of cost me ten bucks," said the driver.

"Really?" said Mr. Johnson.

"Yeah," said the driver. "Guy just got out of the cab, he turned around and give me ten bucks, said take this and bet it in a hurry on a horse named Vulcan, right away."

"Vulcan?" said Mr. Johnson, horrified. "A fire sign on a Wednesday?"

"What?" said the driver. "Anyway, I said to myself if I got no fare between here and there I'd bet the ten, but if anyone looked like they needed the cab I'd take it as a omen and I'd take the ten home to the wife."

"You were very right," said Mr. Johnson heartily. "This is Wednesday, you would have lost your money. Monday, yes, or even Saturday. But never never never a fire sign on a Wednesday. Sunday would have been good, now."

"Vulcan don't run on Sunday," said the driver.

"You wait till another day," said Mr. Johnson. "Down this street, please, driver. I'll get off on the next corner."

"He *told* me Vulcan, though," said the driver.

"I'll tell you," said Mr. Johnson, hesitating with the door of the cab half-open. "You take that ten dollars and I'll give you another ten dollars to go with it, and you go right ahead and bet that money on any Thursday on any horse that has a name indicating . . . let me see, Thursday . . . well, grain. Or any growing food."

"Grain?" said the driver. "You mean a horse named, like, Wheat or something?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Johnson. "Or, as a matter of fact, to make it even easier, any horse whose name includes the letters C, R, L. Perfectly simple."

"Tall corn?" said the driver, a light in his eye. "You mean a horse named, like, Tall Corn?"

"Absolutely," said Mr. Johnson. "Here's your money."

"Tall Corn," said the driver. "Thank *you*, mister."

"Goodbye," said Mr. Johnson.

He was on his own corner and went straight up to his apartment. He let himself in and called "Hello?" and Mrs. Johnson answered from the kitchen, "Hello, dear, aren't you early?"

"Took a taxi home," Mr. Johnson said. "I remembered the cheesecake, too. What's for dinner?"

Mrs. Johnson came out of the kitchen and kissed him; she was a comfortable woman, and smiling as Mr. Johnson smiled. "Hard day?" she asked.

"Not very," said Mr. Johnson,

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hanging his coat in the closet. "How about you?"

"So-so," she said. She stood in the kitchen doorway while he settled into his easy chair and took off his good shoes and took out the paper he had bought that morning. "Here and there," she said.

"I didn't do so badly," Mr. John- said. "Couple young people."

"Fine," she said. "I had a little nap this afternoon, took it easy most of the day. Went into a department store this morning and accused the woman next to me of shoplifting, and had the store detective pick her up. Sent three dogs to the pound — *you* know, the usual thing. Oh, and listen," she added, remembering.

"What?" asked Mr. Johnson.

"Well," she said, "I got onto a bus and asked the driver for a transfer, and when he helped someone else first I said that he was impertinent, and quarreled with him. And then I said why wasn't he in the army, and I said it loud enough for everyone to hear, and I took his number and I turned in a complaint. Probably got him fired."

"Fine," said Mr. Johnson. "But you do look tired. Want to change over tomorrow?"

"I *would* like to," she said. "I could do with a change."

"Right," said Mr. Johnson. "What's for dinner?"

"Veal cutlet."

"Had it for lunch," said Mr. Johnson.

WE HAVEN'T GOT A TIME MACHINE

. . . . to turn the clock back so that you can do your Christmas shopping early. But we do have the next best thing — the gift that makes Christmas shopping a pleasure; the gift you buy from your armchair — a subscription to F&SF at special, low, holiday rates. See back cover for details.

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One of the many reasons for my admiration of Robert Abernathy is that I have yet to see two stories of his which resemble each other — save in originality and skill. Here, in a quite different vein from any of his previous F&SF stories, he tells the nightmare of a man who declared war against the inanimate stones of a city . . . and found his challenge answered.

Single Combat

by ROBERT ABERNATHY

He came warily out of the basement room and locked the door behind him. Tense nerves spurred him suddenly to flight, and he started to bolt up the stair that led from the airwell. He tripped on a step that was crumbling, barely caught himself, and stood, swaying, chest heaving, fighting down panic.

Take it easy. Plenty of time.

Deliberately he turned back to the door, made sure once more of the heavy lock. He thrust the key into his pocket, then drew it out with a wry face and, instead, tossed it at the drainpipe grating. It hit a crossbar and rebounded to lie gleaming on the concrete.

Feverishly, like a man stamping on a scorpion, he kicked the key at the grating. It hung, slipped through tinkling, and fell out of sight.

He was under control again. He climbed the steps without looking back, and paused in the empty alley. No one was watching, there was nothing there but the usual litter, in the narrow way beneath the blind eyes of high painted-out windows. Among soiled papers a garbage can lay overturned. Against the brick wall opposite, a pint whisky bottle stood, placed upright with meaningless care by whoever had drained and left it.

He looked at these things, the ugliness that for so long had seeped into his soul and almost destroyed him, with a new, ironic detachment, seeing them as temporary and devoid of significance.

Late cloudless afternoon lay like a blanket on the city. Above the squat grimy structures close at hand, the great buildings soared, flashing with windows. Above all smoke smudges drifted, lazy in the smothering calm. In the streets traffic growled past, shedding gasoline fumes and the smell of heated asphalt. The alley stank; the city stank; even the swift river stank.

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Head back, eyes narrowed against reflected sunlight, he snuffed its air that was rank with memory.

The stench of many summers . . . *Get up, I smell gas. No, it's the wind from across the river. The refineries there. Well, it's making the baby choke. Can't we do something?*

The everlasting cough and rumble, the voice of the city . . . *Goddamn trucks, going by all night. Can't sleep for them. If I could just get some sleep . . .*

The raucous voices, the jeers, the blows, brutality of life trapped in a steel and cement jungle . . . *Hit him, run him out of the neighborhood. Hit him again. Dirty nigger, dago, kike . . .*

The pavement burning your feet through worn out shoe soles, after miles of tramping on pavement . . . *You're too late, there's no jobs left. Move along. No, I tell you. No. No.*

The hate, growing always.

He spat against the bricks. He said half aloud, "You asked for it. When it happens — maybe, just maybe you'll know it was me, I did it to you!"

In that moment he imagined that the city heard him, that it shrank from him in fear. That a shudder ran through the miles of it, along steel and copper nerves, from its cloudiest spires to its bowels mined deep in the living rock, from the rich men's houses on its heights to its squalid tenements and slimy waterfronts.

Plenty of time. Three hours to go. He would be a long way off, watching, when the moment came. A garbled fragment of Scripture came to his mind: *They shall watch the smoke of her burning from afar off, and the smoke of her burning goeth up forever and ever.*

He emerged almost blindly from the alley mouth, brushing past people on the sidewalk. One foot before the other. Each step took him farther away from the basement room, the closed and locked door.

One foot before the other — as so often, in weariness and despair and hatred, he'd walked these streets before. But now, at every step it seemed that the city rocked under his tread, the tall towers reeled toward engulfment, and the city was afraid.

The blind passersby, the walking dead, noticed nothing. They didn't see that he, who had been small and reviled, had grown taller than the towers, that he had become an avenging giant. . . .

Brakes screamed. He stumbled backward, shaken. He would have taken oath that the light had been green an instant before, as he stepped off the curb.

Engines snorted anger, great wheels pounded past over the uneven pavement. The street was suddenly wide and perilous. He moved back, eying the murky red of the warning light, and set his shoulders against the corner store-front, trying to still his fingers' quivering by fumbling for a cigarette.

He might have been killed. *Not*

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now, he thought, *not by a damfool accident!* Or worse than killed. He had a sickening vision of himself injured, carried helpless but conscious to a hospital, dreadfully aware that back there, not far enough away, behind the locked door one element was changing into another at an unchangeable rate, and time was running out.

Jerkily he snapped his lighter, but it obstinately refused to catch. He swore at it; then he froze. In his ears was the strident twanging of a plucked and broken string, indeterminable of source, stinging nerves already taut.

He looked anxiously right, left, all round. Then distinctly from overhead, in a moment's hush of the traffic, came an uneasy, tortured creaking. He squinted upward, dropped lighter and unlit cigarette and sprang to one side. His heart banged painfully against his ribs.

Just over where he had been standing, the guy-wire supporting a heavy advertising sign had parted, throwing its whole weight on the angle-iron brace. The sign sagged precariously above the sidewalk, the iron buckled and almost gave way.

He stared fascinatedly at it, oblivious of sweat running down his face. The sign teetered and didn't fall. But he had an irrational, frightening conviction that if he were to step back to the spot he had been in a moment earlier, it *would* fall.

That was nonsense. He tried to laugh at the nonsense, but his throat was too tight. He took a cautious step backward, then pivoted and walked swiftly away from the street-corner. He kept to the outer edge of the sidewalk, and glanced frequently upward.

When he had gone half a block, he realized with an icy start that he was going back the way he'd come, back toward the locked room.

He stopped short. But he couldn't return to the corner where he had tried to cross. He stood wavering, again having to quell insinuations of panic.

Directly across the street there was a subway entrance. If he hadn't been bemused he would have noticed it as he passed before.

Of course — the subway: fifteen minutes to safety. He looked to right and left, and upward — with a new caution already become almost habitual — and hurried across the street.

Midway he checked himself so suddenly that he nearly fell. He turned aside, trembling; his steps had carried him to the very edge of a yawning and unguarded manhole.

Shivering with reaction, he faced the subway entrance. And all at once it seemed to him no familiar place, but a hooded gulf leading to a fearsome underworld. From down there, from somewhere below the dimlit stairway that was all he could see, a vast rolling noise ascended, and whiffs of air that was at once dank and hot and smoky.

There was danger everywhere,

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above and beneath. The bellowing of a train passing below was a triumphant voice from Inferno, mingled with a cacophony of shriller notes, the cries of victims crushed and screaming in the nether blackness. For life's own sake he would not, could not set foot on those stairs.

He retreated from the pit, and stood trying to think.

There were other means of transporation. Buses, taxis . . . But he didn't move.

In the street the late afternoon rush traffic surged, snarled, panted. Brakes squalled, tires whimpered, horns blasted ferocious warnings, metal rang. Somewhere a few blocks away, a siren wailed suddenly, rose and fell, sobbing of disaster.

He thought of mishaps, smashups, a million and one chances. He couldn't give up the solid feel of the pavement under his feet.

Plenty of time, he told himself. He ought to know; he'd made the settings and thrown the switch. *Keep your head; you can always walk far enough.*

Another thought, fleeting and dismissed — *they* could have provided him with a quick escape, as perhaps they'd done for the others who'd performed their tasks and left before him. But from first to last he had given *them* very little thought. He'd done their bidding, dutifully learned their slogans that were loud and meaningless as a child's rattle, knowing all along that *they* existed for one reason only: to make him the city's executioner. Their purposes in doing so troubled him not at all; he had his own motives.

Keep your head, and walk out.

Accidents. In a city like this, accidents were always happening. He must avoid them and he mustn't let them rattle him. He mustn't attract attention — be picked up, perhaps, and lodged in jail. There was still plenty of time if he didn't panic.

But the street was all in shadow, and on a great billboard atop the buildings opposite the light was changing, deepening with that late richness that comes before twilight.

He began walking. He watched his step, and watched the darkening air above. Perhaps because he was watchful, nothing untoward happened. Each block finished was a victory, or a step nearer victory.

Lights were coming out. Street lights dispelled the dusk, and a multitude of colored signs glowed and blinked, beckoning to the people who were now more numerous on the sidewalks, as evening came on.

The lights said, *Here is food and drink, and here is music, and a moment to forget.*

The people swarmed like moths beneath the lights, believing them. They were weary and eager to believe. Today had been a hard day, and they supposed that tomorrow would be like today, as tomorrow had always been before.

He alone, pushing among them and past them, knew better. For

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most of these people here, there would be no tomorrow. For most of them — by now he had covered some two miles from Point Zero, which was the locked room in the center of the city, but even here most of them would never know when it came.

He didn't hate them; he even felt a little sorry for them. They were trapped as he had been. But he hated the trap; the city itself, with the venom of bitter years. . . .

He paused briefly on yet another street corner, and almost died there.

This far out, the streetcars ran, and one was passing, thundering steel on steel rails. As its trolley reached the intersection of overhead cables at the crossing, something caught, the line stretched tense and parted with a flash like summer lightning. The broken end came whipping toward him like a great snake striking, hissing and spewing blue flame.

His reflexes saved him with a leap he would not have thought possible. He plunged headlong, sprawling and skinning hands and knees against the pavement, and without a pause was up and running, mind blank with terror.

With a great effort of will he checked his flight and looked back. Most of a block away, the stalled streetcar stood with people beginning to cluster about it — were some of them looking after him? — and a police whistle shrilled.

The whistle stabbed him with fresh panic. He sprinted across the fortunately empty street — remembering the direction he had to keep going — and dived into the shadowy mouth of an alley between lightless buildings.

As he ran through the near-blackness of the alley something, a sixth sense or maybe a seventh, warned him, and he swerved like a football player avoiding a tackler. The section of cornice, falling soundlessly from above, shattered to bits and powder a yard away from him. Overhead disturbed pigeons fluttered sleepily.

He plunged out into the open on a lighted but almost deserted street. For a bare second he paused — with the sense that to hesitate any longer might be fatal — then, recognizing where he was, veered to the left and sprinted again.

The sidewalk here was old, of bricks. Abruptly it seemed to heave and buckle ahead of him, striving to trip him, but he hurdled the rough place and pounded on. Up the rise of a gentle hill, and past the crest. Down there the way ended in a cross-street, and there were no more lights, but beyond — darkness with a feeling of open space, and a remote glimmer of water.

He was almost there, he was going to make it —

Out of the parkway slewed a huge tank truck, taking the corner too fast, and as it skidded, jackknifing, the coupling between tractor and trailer gave way. The cab bounced

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up onto the sidewalk, snapping a lamppost before it stopped; and the tank rolled over, blocking the street, with a monstrous roar of crumpling metal. The lights all along the street went out, but moments later it was lit by the red glare of flames. Fire, belching black smoke, rose like a wall.

He spun round, almost falling, straightarming himself off a brick wall with a violence that all but broke his wrist. He ran. There was no shred of doubt left in his mind that he was hunted — not, so far at least, by men, but by something mightier than any army of men. He ran as a hunted animal runs, making sudden shifts that might confuse the implacable enemy. There must be a limit to the number of traps it could set for him. . . .

Once more he swung into a street that led downward toward the river, and pelted headlong down it, gulping for his second wind. Closer . . . closer . . . Along the edge of the parkway were warning lamps smokily burning, a wooden barricade, and beyond it the raw black slash of a bottomless trench. But he was past being turned back. He put all he had left into one great leap, and landed, rolling, clawing in loose earth that slipped treacherously away beneath him — But *earth!*

He reeled erect and staggered on for a few yards, feeling grass and soil underfoot, not concrete or asphalt, and seeing branches against the sky.

He sank down exhausted, and putting out one hand to steady himself felt the roughness of bark. Gratefully he leaned against the shaggy trunk, clasped lover's arms around it. Under him were grass and leaves and humus, and insects fiddled plaintively nearby.

Not far away, beyond the excavation he had sprung across, loomed the fronts of houses with lit windows scattered like misplaced eyes, and the streetlights burned; and across the river, reflected in it, were moving stars of traffic and towering buildings like constellations. Between heaven and earth hung a red star, blinking on and off, on and off, a warning to planes, a warning . . . But here he was safe, for the moment.

The strip of park by the river's edge was an island, in the city but not of it, like the river itself, which a dozen yards away glinted with ripples and chuckled faintly against the stones of its margin. Here he could rest for a few minutes, try to think of a way out.

He didn't know just what time it was, but he knew it was late. Not too late yet, however. There was still time . . .

Time to make his way out to a safe distance — barring accidents. But he no longer believed in accidents.

Instead — he knew. What had been a prescient fear was truth. He cowered, seeing the city around him, whole, immense, living — the true Leviathan.

For 300 years the city had been

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growing. Growth — the elemental law of life. Like a cancer budding from a few wild cells, lodged half by chance at the meeting of river and sea, proliferating, thrusting tentacles far up the valley and for miles along the hollows of the hills, eating deeper and deeper into the earth on which it rested.

As it grew, it drew nourishment from a hundred, a thousand miles of hinterland; for it the land yielded up its fatness and the forests were mown like grain, and men and animals bred also to feed its ever-increasing hunger. The long fingers of its piers thrust out into the ocean to snare the ships from all the continents.

And as it fed, it voided its wastes into the sea, and breathed its poisons into the air, and grew fouler as it grew more mighty.

It developed by degrees a central nervous system of strung wires and buried cables, a circulatory system with pumps and reservoirs, an excretory system. It evolved from an invertebrate enormity of wild growth to a higher creature having the tangible attributes that go with the subjective concepts of *will* and *purpose* and *consciousness*. . . .

Its consciousness he could not imagine; its ultimate purposes he could not guess. But he felt the pain of flesh bruised against the city's stones, and realized shivering how the city must hate him. No longer with the lordly impersonal contempt which he, like so many, had received as his birthright. It could no longer be indifferent to the vermin who were its victims. Now, for the first time in its 300 years, it was threatened in its life.

And vengefully it had sought his life. He had not escaped. The city was very powerful and very cunning. It still surrounded him, waiting; it knew he couldn't stay here. Whichever way he looked, the lights stared and winked at him.

His thoughts raced. There was still time . . .

Time to surrender, to go back. He could hasten back to the locked room (but he had thrown away the key and he would have to get help to break down the door), he could reach it in time to stop the process going on there, as only he in all the city knew how. If he did that, he was sure, there would be no more accidents. The things that had happened had been designed to break his spirit, to drive him back.

Suddenly he sat bolt upright, dazzled by insight. Then he laughed — not mirthfully, but hysterically, viciously, turning his head slowly to survey the lights around him.

"But you don't dare kill me!" he said aloud. "I'm the only one that could still save you. You can try to scare me into going back — but you can't kill me, because if I die your last hope is gone!"

He got to his feet unsteadily, bracing himself against the tree-trunk. But he felt strength flowing back into him, the strength of his hate.

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"Try and stop me!" he said between his teeth. "Try!"

He forged straight ahead, walking and dog-trotting by turns. He no longer glanced up or down. Crossing a broad avenue against the lights, he laughed wildly when the fender of a swerving truck missed him by inches. He knew that it had to miss.

He laughed again when the bars of a railroad crossing descended in his face, and jogged chuckling across the tracks under the glaring eye of the locomotive — confident that, if he were not in time to escape it otherwise, the train would be derailed before it hit him.

A sign ahead said DANGER, and he laughed loudly and did not turn aside.

Along this suburban street were floodlights, and men working under them — a rush job, obviously, and a job whose supreme irony only he could appreciate. They were wrecking a row of ugly old houses, preparing ground for some new construction that would never be built. At this distance from Point Zero downtown, they were out of the radius of total destruction, but even here very few dwellings would remain standing after the blast and the fires. . . . He hurried past, ignoring the lights and the workmen, and broke into a trot again when someone shouted, "Hey!"

Then a rumbling roar began, and he looked up stunned to see a wall of masonry leaning above him, breaking apart as it fell. It seemed to fall with torturing slowness, but there was no time to avoid it.

Consciousness hadn't left him, but he was unable to move, and aware of much pain. There seemed to be no bones broken, but a ton of stone prisoned his legs, and another mass lay wedged across his chest, not bearing fully on him, but bowing his body backward across a heavy wooden beam.

Voices, faces, lights floated in chaos around him. Hands plucked futilely at the wood and stone.

"Christ, he didn't pay no attention —"

"Don't stand there, get a jack!"

"Watch it, if that was to shift a little —"

He hung there in the glare of the floodlights, pinioned as if by the fingers of a gigantic hand. Those fingers needed only to twitch, the mass of stone above to move only an inch or two, and his spine would snap.

When they tried to free him with pry bars, he screamed, and they drew back.

"Wait."

"Who put in the call to the emergency squad?"

A siren moaned to a stop. More lights. Another siren approaching. Dizzily he glimpsed uniforms, the insignia of men who served the city.

He fought for breath, and shrieked, "Fools! You're corpuscles! That's all you are — corpuscles!"

"Poor guy's delirious."

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"Stand back, now, stand back."

He shrieked again, "I know, I know what it wants, but I won't —"

"Take it easy, fellow, we'll —"

"I won't —" The stone above moved by a fraction of an inch and his voice snapped like a string. His eyes stared past the faces and the lights, and he groaned, "No, no. I'll tell. I'll tell!"

"Take it easy now —"

"Fools!" he gasped. And in short choking sentences, breath rattling between, he told them. Everything; what was in the locked basement room, and how to find it, and how to dismantle it without exploding it.

There was still barely time.

With dazed looks they heard. "May be out of his head, all right. . . . But you can't take a chance with something like *that*. Got the address? Got all of it?"

Nearby a voice spoke crisply, rapidly, answered startled questions from a radio speaker. Far off, in the city's threatened heart, sirens sprang to life one by one and raced crying through the night.

"Come on, we've still got a job here. Bring that jack —"

But there was a grating sound, the ponderous mass of masonry began to shift downward. One inch, two inches, three — Those around threw their strength against the stone, but uselessly. The trapped man screamed in a terrible high voice and was silent.

The men looked helplessly into one another's white faces.

The city was merciless.

The Glass of the Future

Pre-delinquents who hang about bars
Should be taught to look up to the stars;
In a decade or two
They may serve on the crew
Which will drink in the first bars on Mars.

HERMAN W. MUDGETT

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Here is F&SF's special Christmas present to you. When I was a child (and I imagine the same was true for you), there was only one absolutely essential Christmas present; toys and candy and games were all very well, but the one imperative item was an Oz book. The fine free-wheeling fantasy of Oz, so rich in imagination, humor, excitement and inventiveness, is — whatever! the austere critics of juvenile literature may say — one of the great treasures of American culture; and I don't know a better way of celebrating Christmas with you than by offering you the first detailed study of Oz and its creator ever to be published in a magazine. Martin Gardner is a prolific contributor to the fabulously successful juvenile periodical, Humpty Dumpty's Magazine. *He is also a firstrate amateur magician, an able mathematician, and a writer of articles on untold subjects, of a splendid book on pseudo-scientific crackpottery,* IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE (*Putnam's, 1952*), *and of delightful, if too infrequent, science-fantasy. More importantly, he is a man who knows and loves Oz, as you'll discover in this fascinating story of the birth and development of our most joyous legend. (Both Mr. Gardner and I wish to thank two deeply devoted Oz-scholars, Jack Snow and Annette Peltz McComas, for many valuable notes and suggestions.)*

The Royal Historian of Oz

by MARTIN GARDNER

(first of two parts)

"*It is not down on any map; true places never are.*" — MELVILLE

AMERICA'S GREATEST WRITER OF juvenile fantasy was, as everyone knows except librarians and professional critics of children's literature, L. Frank Baum. His *Wizard of Oz* delighted a million youngsters when it first appeared in 1900, and has since become the nation's classic native fairy tale. Although this was Baum's most popular work, his fourteen succeeding books about Oz have gone through edition after edition. A conservative estimate on the number of his Oz books which have been sold, not counting foreign

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translations, is well over five million. They are still selling.

Yet when one turns to the critical literature on juvenile writing, in search of references to Baum, one meets with thunderous silence. *A Critical History of Children's Literature*, the most definitive to date, was published in 1953. It contains no mention of Baum. Nor is he mentioned in the sections on juvenile fantasy in the leading encyclopedias. No magazine article on Baum has ever appeared, with the exception of a short piece by James Thurber in the *New Republic* twenty years ago.

Twentieth Century Authors contains a short, inaccurate biography of Baum which includes this estimate: "The [Oz] books were lacking in style and in imaginative distinction." By and large this is the opinion of most critics. Oz books are regarded as cheap popular literature in a class with Tom Swift and Elsie Dinsmore.

Fortunately, the children themselves neither know nor care about the currently fashionable attitudes of the critics. Unlike adults, they read with fresh minds. If they like a book they say so. If they don't like a book they say so. Many of the so-called juvenile classics they don't like at all. Have you ever tried, for example, to read either of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books to a modern American child? They are filled with words like *treacle* which no one understands, with frightening nightmarish episodes, complex logical paradoxes, and implications that escape even an adult unless he plays chess and is mathematically inclined.

There is no doubt, however, about the popularity of Baum's Oz books. For 50 years children have read and loved them passionately, and it is only a matter of time until the critics develop sufficient curiosity to read the books themselves. When they do, they will be surprised to find the books are well written, rich in excitement, humor, and philosophy, and with sustained imaginative invention of the highest order. In anticipation, therefore, of this event, it may be of interest to record here for the first time the story of Baum's colorful career.

Lyman Frank Baum was born in 1856 in the little town of Chittenango, near Syracuse, N. Y. His mother, Cynthia Stanton, was Scotch-Irish in descent and a devout, church-going Methodist. On his father's side his ancestors came from Holland where they had the name of von Baum, and settled in the United States before the Revolutionary War. His grandfather, the Rev. John Baum, was a Methodist circuit-riding minister. Benjamin Ward Baum, his father, was one of the nation's earliest oil producers.

Baum's childhood was spent in comparative luxury at Roselawn, his father's estate outside the town of Mattydale, N. Y. He was privately tutored, except for a short period of attendance at Peekskill

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Military Academy. Baum did not take to military discipline, which may explain the satire that pervades his descriptions of the Royal Army of Oz. (For a time this army numbered 27 officers and one private named Omby Amby, though on most occasions it consisted only of the Soldier with the Green Whiskers.)

When Baum was twelve, his father bought him an elaborate printing press, and for three years young Frank wrote and printed a monthly paper which he called the *Roselawn Home Journal*. This stimulated his interest in a newspaper career, and at the age of seventeen he took a job in New York as cub reporter on the *World*. Two years later he opened his own printing shop at Bradford, Pa., where he established the *New Era*, a weekly paper. But the work was dull and his spirit restless. In 1880 he opened an opera house in Olean, Pa. It was destroyed by fire before the year ended.

The theatrical world had always fascinated Baum. Using the name of George Brook (his parents frowned on his associations with the stage) he occasionally acted with a traveling stock company managed by his uncle. After the destruction of his opera house, Baum tried his hand at play writing, and in 1882 achieved his first literary success. It was an Irish melodrama and musical called *The Maid of Arran*. His uncle produced the play in New York where it was an immediate success. Baum himself, under the name of Louis F. Baum, played the lead. His acting was described in one review as "quiet and effective."

To judge by early descriptions, young Baum must have made an impressive stage appearance. He was tall, slender, and athletically proportioned, with dark hair and eyes, fair skin, and handsome, angular features. His voice was low and well modulated. In later years he always wore the large bicycle-handle mustache that was fashionable in his time. In photographs his eyes seem humorous, kindly, dreamy.

During the first year of his play's success, Baum married Maud Gage, of Fayetteville, N. Y. It proved to be a permanent and unusually happy marriage. The play was on the road for several years, but when Maud became pregnant, Baum dropped out of the cast and returned to Syracuse. There he helped his father sell Baum's Casterine, a crude oil used for greasing axles. This aspect of the oil business did not appeal to him. He tried three more Irish melodramas — *Matches*, *Kilmorne*, and *The Queen of Killarney* — but they were not financially profitable.

In 1887, discouraged by the failures of his plays and with two small sons to support, Baum developed a strong desire to pioneer in the Middle West. His wife's brother lived in Aberdeen, a small prairie town in South Dakota, and it was there that Baum took his family.

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At first he ran a variety store called Baum's Bazaar. Then he bought a weekly paper, the *Saturday Pioneer*, which he edited for two years. "Our Landlady," his front page column, poked fun at the local gentry and apparently made a few enemies. There were later rumors that he became involved in a pistol duel with one villager. No shots were fired, however, as both participants reportedly broke into a run and vanished from the scene. A collection of the best of Baum's newspaper columns was published in 1941 by the South Dakota Federal Writer's Project.

Two more sons were born in Aberdeen. The paper provided inadequate subsistence, and in 1891 Baum moved his family to Chicago where he worked as a reporter on the *Chicago Post*. For a time he traveled through the Middle West selling crockery while his wife supplemented the family income by doing embroidery. These were hard years, and Baum was too proud to accept money from his father or from his older brother, a prominent throat specialist in Syracuse. His luck turned in 1897 when he tapped a hitherto unexploited magazine field by founding the *Show Window*, a monthly periodical for window trimmers.

It was during Baum's three years as editor of this successful trade journal that he began his career as a writer of juvenile fiction. For years he had delighted his four sons by weaving ingenious tales around familiar Mother Goose rhymes. In 1897 a collection of these stories was published in a handsome edition illustrated by Maxfield Parrish. *Mother Goose in Prose*, as it was called, sold moderately well.

Baum's second book, *By the Candelabra's Glare*, is now extremely rare and much sought by collectors. He issued it himself in 1898, setting the type, printing, and even binding it in his own workshop. It is a collection of sentimental, undistinguished verse. "My best friends have never called me a poet," he wrote in the foreword, "and I have been forced to admire their restraint." One poem, "La Reine Est Morte — Vive la Reine!" is an amusing attack on the type of woman active in the Feminist movement. The third stanza reads:

And shout hurrah for the woman new!
With her necktie, shirt and toothpick shoe,
With tailor-made suit and mien severe
She's here!

Baum's mother-in-law was a prominent feminist, a fact that may help explain his dislike of the New Woman. Even the Oz books contain many sly digs at the suffragettes, and one book, *The Land of Oz*, is one long satire on the movement. It chronicles the temporary overthrow of Oz by an Army of young women. The Revolution is blood-

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less, owing to the fact that the Royal Army (*i.e.*, the Soldier with the Green Whiskers) flees in terror when the girl soldiers brandish their knitting needles at him. Once the female dictatorship is established, the husbands of Oz are forced to take over the former duties of their wives. This proves annoying to both sides, but fortunately the throne is eventually restored.

General Jinjur, the pretty farm girl who leads the revolt, is one of Baum's best "meat people" characterizations (in Oz, "meat people" are sharply distinguished from such personages as the Scarecrow and Tin Woodman who have no flesh and blood). She is a shrewdly drawn portrait of the masculine protest type. Her face wears "an expression of discontent coupled to a shade of defiance or audacity." She walks with "swift strides" and there is about her "an air of decision and importance." In a later Oz book she blacks her husband's eye for milking a red cow when she wanted him to milk the white one. Whenever the Scarecrow's painted face becomes faded, it is Jinjur who enjoys retouching it. It is not her own face that she paints, but that of a straw man.

Baum's third work, published in 1899, was *Father Goose, His Book*, a collection of nonsense rhymes for children. The manuscript had been rejected by all leading publishers, and was finally issued by a Chicago printer only because Baum and his illustrator, W. W. Denslow, paid the expenses. To everyone's surprise the book caught on and sold over 30,000 copies in the first three months. Twenty-six of the verses were set to music and issued the following year as *The Songs of Father Goose*.

For several years Baum had been taking his family each summer to Macatawa, a Michigan resort town on the shore of Lake Michigan. With the money he made on *Father Goose* he had a summer cottage built there which he named "The Sign of the Goose." Most of the furniture was built by Baum himself. A slight stroke had temporarily paralyzed one side of his face, and his doctor had advised manual work. It was characteristic of Baum that he used the goose as a decorative motif. A large rocking chair was in the shape of a goose. A frieze of green geese bordered the living room walls. A stained glass window portrayed a goose in brilliant colors. Even the tiny brass heads of his upholstery tacks were geese!

Baum continued to edit his trade journal, and in 1900 published *The Art of Decorating*, a mammoth handbook on the decoration of dry goods windows and interiors. But his interest had shifted to juvenile writing and his head was brimming with unusual ideas. During that year four children's books came from his pen. Two were unimportant — *The Army Alphabet* and *The Navy Alphabet*, oversize books of mediocre verse

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telling the reader that A stands for Admiral, B for Bulwark, and so on. The two important books were fantasies, each concerned with adventures in a mythical country. *A New Wonderland* was about the beautiful valley of Mo. The other book — the book destined to make him famous — was *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz.*

A New Wonderland, or *The Magical Monarch of Mo* as it was later called, is a collection of short tales, all funny and many excellent. *The Wizard of Oz*, to give it its later and briefer title, was published in May by the George M. Hill Co. — the Chicago firm that had published *Father Goose.* There is no indication that Baum considered it superior to *A New Wonderland* or that he had in mind a series of books about Oz. But before a year had passed *The Wizard* had sold a million copies.

It sold for two reasons. It was a story children loved to have read to them and a story adults enjoyed reading. Like Alice, Dorothy is an unaffected little girl who by sudden accident finds herself having strange adventures in a magic land. Alice plunged into Wonderland by falling down a rabbit hole. Dorothy Gale, an orphan country girl from Kansas, is blown into Oz by a cyclone. There is no need to detail here the familiar story or characters. It is worth recalling, however, that behind the plot, as in all of Baum's fantasies, there lurks many an intended level of higher meaning.

For example, the Cowardly Lion, Scarecrow, and Tin Woodman illustrate delightfully the human tendency to confuse a real virtue with its valueless outer symbols. The Cowardly Lion wants the Wizard to give him courage, the Scarecrow wants brains, and the Tin Woodman desires a heart. All three possess, of course, the things they are seeking. The Lion quakes with fear but meets all dangers bravely. The Scarecrow thinks better than anyone in the party, and the Tin Woodman is so concerned over his lack of a heart that his "Reverence for Life" exceeds even that of a Schweitzer. On one occasion when he accidentally steps on a beetle he weeps so copiously that it rusts and locks his jaws.

Even the ancient philosophic question of which is superior, the head or the heart, is explicitly raised. "I shall ask for brains instead of a heart," remarks the straw man, "for a fool would not know what to do with a heart if he had one." To which the tin man replies, "I shall take the heart, for brains do not make one happy, and happiness is the best thing in the world."

Baum wisely adds: "Dorothy did not say anything, for she was puzzled to know which of her two friends was right."

After the success of *The Wizard*, Baum handed his trade journal over to a new editor and began work in earnest on other books for children. Three were published the following

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year, none about Oz. *Dot and Tot of Merryland* is a full length fantasy for very young readers. *The Master Key*, for older boys, is a science fiction story about the wonders of electricity. The third volume, *Baum's American Fairy Tales*, deserves special mention because it marks the first appearance in American letters of fairy tales of merit which have the United States as a setting.

In 1902 Baum published *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus*, a warm, moving story told in almost Biblical prose. Its appearance, however, was completely overshadowed by the success in Chicago of a musical extravaganza based on *The Wizard*. Baum had written the book and lyrics, but the producer revised the script heavily until it bore little resemblance to the original. Oz fans are usually shocked to learn that in the stage version Dorothy's pet is not a little black dog named Toto, but a huge cow called Imogene. The Wizard, no longer a carnival performer from Omaha, is an Irishman with a heavy brogue. And there is a Poet Prince with whom Dorothy falls in love!

At first Baum was indignant. But after the musical had become a smashing success, playing eighteen months on Broadway and keeping two road companies busy for six years, he reluctantly decided that the producer knew his business. (A member of a 1902 Chicago audience reports that one of the wonders and excitements of the show was the opening scene: a real motion picture of the cyclone which carried Dorothy to Oz! This shrewd piece of showmanship — an extraordinary technical marvel for its time — may have been an afterthought added in later performances, since the original program contains no reference to it.)

It was this show which elevated the obscure vaudeville team of Fred Stone and Dave Montgomery to overnight stardom. Stone played the Scarecrow and Montgomery the Tin Woodman. (Dorothy, it is interesting to note, was sung by Anna Laughlin, mother of today's "star-spangled soprano," Lucy Monroe.) For some time the two comics had been among Baum's many friends in the entertainment world. They were in England when he wired them to return for parts in the show. "You are a scarecrow," he is reported to have said to Stone when he arrived. To which Stone replied indignantly that his clothes had been made by the finest of English tailors.

Flushed with the success of the show, Baum took a brief vacation in Paris with Paul Tietjens, composer of the musical score, and Denslow, who had illustrated the original book. There Tietjens met and married the American girl who later become the poet Eunice Tietjens. In her autobiography, *The World at My Shoulder*, 1938, she recalls her impressions of Baum when she and

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her husband visited him at "The Sign of the Goose."

"L. Frank Baum was a character," she writes. "He was tall and rangy, with an imagination and a vitality which constantly ran away with him. He never wrote fewer than four books a year. . . . Constantly exercising his imagination as he did, he had come to the place where he could honestly not tell the difference between what he had done and what he had imagined. Everything he said had to be taken with at least a half-pound of salt. But he was a fascinating companion.

"He was never without a cigar in his mouth, but it was always unlit. His doctor had forbidden him to smoke, so he chewed up six cigars a day instead. There was one exception to this. Before he took his swim in the lake in the afternoon he would light a cigar and walk immediately into the water. He would solemnly wade out till the water was up to his neck and there walk parallel with the shore, moving his arms to give the impression that he was swimming. When a wave splashed on the cigar and put it out, he at once came in and dressed.

"His house was full of the most remarkable mementos of the time when it had been necessary for him 'to rest his brain,' following a stroke of facial paralysis. He had painted the walls with stencilled designs; he had made a sign of wrought iron and painted wood for the dooryard . . . ; he had made furniture. . . . Last of all, because all this had not yet rested his brain enough, he had made an elaborate piano arrangement of Paul's music for *The Wizard of Oz* — though he was no musician it was pretty good — had then figured out the system by which pianola records were made, and had cut a full-length record of this arrangement out of wrapping paper! This seems to have done the trick, and he was presently back at work."

John Fletcher Seymour, a Chicago artist who also was a friend of Baum's during this period, recalls him as "a rakish, sort of wicked and dangerous type . . . a gambler with his abilities and close to being broke most of the time." Others remember him as a modest, dignified man who enjoyed meeting people, talking, and telling funny stories. "He was a very kindly man," Mrs. Baum recalls in a letter, "never angry, pleasant to everyone, but when his mind was active with some story he would meet his best friend and not see him."

At one time when he had not written for weeks, Mrs. Baum asked him what the trouble was. "They won't do what I want them to," he said. When he began writing again, and she asked how the matter had been settled, his answer was, "By letting them do what they wanted to." It is a believable answer. Baum was a natural storyteller, and his characters seem always to move with a life of their own.

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In spite of the fact that he continued to receive hundreds of letters (a mere trickle of the deluge to come!) from children who wanted to hear more about Oz, Baum's interests still lay in fairy tales of other sorts. His *Enchanted Island of Yew*, 1903, is not a bad story (the chapter on Twi, a land where everything exists in double form, is an amazing tour de force) but it did not sell as well as *The Wizard*. Finally, in 1904 Baum yielded to the demands of his readers. He wrote *The Marvelous Land of Oz* (now published as *The Land of Oz*), and dedicated it, understandably, to Montgomery and Stone. It is the only Oz book in which Dorothy does not appear. The central character, a small boy named Tip, is later revealed to be Princess Ozma in enchanted form. For some time the Baums had passionately wanted a daughter, and this transformation of Tip may well have been an unconscious expression of such a desire.

Many new and entertaining "meatless" characters are introduced in *The Land of Oz*. Jack Pumpkinhead is an awkward wooden figure whose head is a pumpkin carved in an eternal grin. A wooden sawhorse is brought to life, much to its own astonishment. And of course we must not fail to mention H. M. Woggle-Bug, T. E.

The Woggle-Bug is Baum's caricature of the overeducated pedant. He had originally been an ordinary woggle-bug, living in the hearth of a country schoolhouse. There he had become extremely learned by listening to the lectures of Professor Nowitall. One day the professor discovered him in the room, and to show his pupils what a woggle-bug looked like, put him in a device which threw his magnified image on a screen. At a moment when the attention of the class was distracted, the woggle-bug stepped down from the screen and made his escape in an enlarged condition. "H. M." stands for "Highly Magnified," and "T. E." for "Thoroughly Educated." The Woggle-Bug is addicted to using big words and has to be rebuked occasionally for his tendency to make bad puns. This is partly a satire on Baum himself, for the Oz books abound in puns. They reach a crescendo in a later book when Dorothy visits the Kingdom of Utensia where all the citizens are pieces of kitchenware. In eight pages of text Baum manages to introduce no less than 50 puns.

The Woggle-Bug eventually becomes the President of the College of Art and Athletic Perfection. His great contribution to the higher learning is the invention of a pill which gives a student all the knowledge he needs simply by swallowing it. This frees students from the burden of attending classes and permits them to spend all their time on sports.

The Woggle-Bug, an operetta which Baum based on *The Land*

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of Oz, was produced in Chicago in 1905, but its run was short. *The Woggle-Bug Book*, issued the same year, is now a rare collector's item. It is a large picture book telling of the Woggle-Bug's adventures in an American city.

In addition to his summer home at Macatawa, Baum now began spending part of each winter in a cottage at Coronado, on the California coast. In 1905 he purchased Pedloe Island, 80 miles off the coast, and announced his plans to convert the island into a miniature land of Oz which would serve as a playground for youngsters. An eleven-year-old San Francisco girl was appointed Princess of Oz. A palace and statues of leading Oz personages were to be erected, and a monument to Jack Pumpkinhead built on Wizard's Point. The project apparently never got beyond the planning stage.

Queen Zixi of Ix, one of Baum's finest fairy tales, was serialized in *St. Nicholas* magazine in 1904 and published as a book the following year. Many of his best magazine stories, however, have never been reprinted — notably a series of nine animal tales that ran in *The Delineator* in 1905.

That same year Baum made his first attempt at adult fiction.* *The Fate of a Crown*, a romantic novel about Brazil, was published under the pseudonym of Schuyler Staunton. Another romance by Staunton, *Daughters of Destiny*, appeared the following year. His final attempt along these lines was *The Last Egyptian*, issued anonymously in 1908. The three novels are fair adventure tales, but otherwise have little to recommend them.

Six other pseudonyms were used by Baum. Captain Hugh Fitzgerald was his nom de plume for three boys' books about the adventures of Sam Steele. Six novels about the Boy Fortune Hunters came out under the name of Floyd Akers. John Estes Cooke (not to be confused with the Virginia historian John Esten Cooke whom Baum probably admired) was the name he used for a privately issued edition of *Tamawaca Tales*. Tamawaca is an anagram of Macatawa. The stories are about Baum's friends in the resort area.

Under the name of Mrs. Edith Van Dyne, Baum wrote about twenty novels for young girls. Ten of them were in a series about Aunt Jane's Nieces, beginning with *Aunt Jane's Nieces* in 1906 and ending with *Aunt Jane's Nieces in*

* Mr. Gardner is in error here. Baum published at least one adult short story as early as 1897, around the same time as his first juvenile book. This was, of all things, a pure locked-room murder story, with villainy triumphant! Titled *The Suicide of Kiaros*, it appeared in the September, 1897 issue of a pocket-size magazine called *The White Elephant*. Forgotten for almost 60 years, it was recently discovered by Ellery Queen and reprinted in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, November, 1954, with a long introduction hymning the "new and irresistible vistas," the "wonder and surprise" of the Oz stories. — A. B.

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the Red Cross in 1915. Mrs. Van Dyne also produced seven books about Mary Louise and two about Orissa Kane, a girl aviator. *Annabel*, a love story about a young red-haired lass, appeared under the name of Suzanne Metcalf. As Laura Bancroft, Baum published six small books of fantasy which were later issued as a single volume called *Twinkle and Chubbins. Policeman Bluejay*, a longer fantasy, was also written by Miss Bancroft, but later issued under Baum's name as *Babes in Birdland*.

There is no need to look for hidden compulsions in Baum's use of these pseudonyms. He had a large family to support, the demand for books of this sort was great, he was a prolific writer, and there were sound publishing reasons for using female names on books for girls or very young children. With the possible exception of the tales by Laura Bancroft, none of Baum's pseudonymous works are of lasting value. But the potboilers for older boys and girls, including two published under his own name (*The Daring Twins* and *Phoebe Daring*) brought him a steady and not inconsiderable income.

On one occasion an eastern publisher who was visiting Chicago expressed to Baum's publisher a strong desire to meet Mrs. Van Dyne. He was so persistent that the firm finally arranged a tea at which the visitor was introduced to a lady who had been carefully coached to play the role of Mrs. Van Dyne. The publisher was charmed and edified. Baum and his wife attended the tea, enjoying the hoax immensely.

In 1907 Baum returned to his role of Father Goose by publishing *Father Goose's Year Book*, a kind of diary with blank pages on the right and humorous poems and aphorisms (such as "Rolling billiard balls gather no salary") on the left. But Baum's readers were not interested in Father Goose; they wanted to hear more about Oz.

For more about Oz, and in particular more about its Royal Historian, see the next issue of F&SF, in which Martin Gardner will describe the triumphant growth of the Oz series and the happy last years of its creator in Ozcot, Hollywood, concluding with a complete descriptive checklist of all Baum's books of fantasy — an invaluable item for every sensible reader who wants to make sure of reading every tale by this great American storyteller.

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All thanks to that peerless truffle hound of story-discovery, Groff Conklin, who unearthed in the unlikely pages of The New Statesman and Nation *this unforgettable nightmare of future technological warfare.*

The Girl in the Ice

by EMYR HUMPHREYS

BY AN EVENING OF DECEMBER THERE was nothing left to conquer. Weary of monotonous slaughter, too bored to sleep, they sat about the glass-topped table. Sump, who was, in a sense, the most simple among them, had tried to fracture the glass with his intoxipot. He was foolishly surprised to find it unbreakable. Through the tattered roof the darkness crowded in, and it began to rain; the soft spots pattered on their plated skulls, and wriggled greasily down their alloyed battle wear. From a jagged hole above the bar it fell upon the barmaid's head, unwinding her waved hair, washing mascara down her cheeks to mingle with the stains of her stale tears. Like a piece of statuary after an explosion she had been propped against the bar all day. It was impossible to tell whether she was alive or dead.

Tappit, still young and talkative, lay mumbling on the floor. During the lull he had again been troubled by the vision of a girl's body in a block of ice. A recent blow on the mouth had loosened his teeth, and the noise he made was a heavy salivaed rattle, broken by hissing sobs. As his muttering rose and fell, no one understood or indeed listened to what he was saying until his churning voice clarified into a lumpy monosyllabic groan. And then quite distinctly he pronounced the word *home*. Hardly glancing at him, Bigend, the N.C.O., again kicked him in the mouth. Tappit toppled sideways and his noise spluttered quietly on the wet floor — the engine of a motor-boat misfiring in the distance, the song of a grasshopper with wet feet — and then gave out.

The silence was complete, grave-like. The men moved perceptibly, each with his own unpractised gesture of comfort, as though wrapping silence about them, a great blanket, comfortable and almost dry. Piston yawned and bent forward, pillowing his head in his arms. Sump also spread his arms forward, but a slight gesture from Bigend reminded him

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of his duty. He wound up the weapon at his elbow and switched the eye at the back of his head off and on, with needless thoroughness, to see if it was working.

Nothing in the stricken town stirred as the rain fell through the torn roofs and between the empty walls. Most of it had been destroyed at the beginning. Bigend, a veteran of thirty years' service, wondered whether he had been here before. There were landmarks he had been trained to recognise. So many years ago, before the "second skin" or the "soldier's wife" had been invented, before the annihilation of Paris or the year of icebergs, he remembered a similar outline of ruins, and a similar cemetery of crooked crosses on the hill outside the town.

Crank prodded the table with his finger. Piston jerked his head up and woke up.

"Listen," Crank said. He laid his wafer-like microphone in the centre of the table and they heard distinctly the whirr of winged boots approaching. Bigend gave an order and they made up the pentagonal formation, switching on the lethal security circle. There was no tension in their waiting. Unbroken victory had made each battle a parade-ground exercise. They did not attack now, because they were almost certain that only the "good" were living. But frequent schism and treachery had made them cautious. And of late it had been difficult to ascertain from day to day whether their helmets were of the correct colour.

The courier came straight to them. The message in picture alphabet shining on his chest was brief. It meant Immediate Demobilisation, all troops finding their own way back, to report for work at the City of Caves. It was issued under the seal of the First Self.

With a whirring shuffle like a metal pheasant rising the courier was gone. The men sat down again and listened to Crank, who had the most retentive memory, repeating the communiqué. He repeated it several times, enjoying the sound of his own voice. Years ago, during the last interlude of peace, he had been a baseball commentator. Sump, always his most appreciative listener, asked him what demobilisation meant. Bigend watched him narrowly. All the men were listening and although he knew they could never get on without him, Bigend felt vaguely uneasy. They would die of hunger, kill each other in quarrel, drink poisoned liquid, get lost, or be eaten by the new cannibals.

Crank began to explain the strange word in terms of Dialectical Technophy.

"It is quite clear," he said in a jerky voice that gathered speed as he went on, "that Demobilisation means a reversion to that primitive state of individuality in free communion which we theoretically know to be the ultimate aim of the

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Technic Revolution. To quote the immortal words of the Great Technician: 'That day shall come when the weary soldier shall put away his weapons and the woman of the factory turn away from feeding her insatiable machine and in the gardens of this world they shall play together like little children.'

"But, as the First Commentator pointed out," Crank continued, any putting away of weapons, any deserted machines *before* the appointed dialectical day must be called treachery and treason, logically punished by sudden death. The question at issue therefore must be, does this order *Demobilisation* suggest that the dialectical day, coincidental with the Great Technician's 'that-day-shall-come,' has or is about to arrive. The Second Commentator has said that part of the strategy of the bestial forces inimical to the Technic Revolution will be to sponsor False Prophets to give false announcements. That being the case the practical rule for every Technic soldier should be 'when in doubt, obey orders.'"

Bigend nodded. Crank began to smile, pleased with his dialectical effort. Two streams of saliva fell from his mouth, due to the strain of pronouncing unusual and half-forgotten words. Sump, still nodding as though he understood, began playing a game of electric poker with Piston. Although Piston was sleepy, Sump did not win.

Tappit had listened with his mouth open to Crank's dialectical discourse. So long ago, during a time when leave was still granted, he had loved a factory novice. In the evening he had taken her to the Cave of Antiquities where his father was caretaker and preserved her in a block of opalescent ice. He was young and impetuous and believed that "the-day-that-shall-come" would be within his lifetime.

Crank's words had disturbed him strangely. Once again he saw the forgotten image, the blurred outline of the naked girl in the clouded ice. How many times had he dreamt in the old days of the ice melting and the girl rising like Aphrodite with glistening limbs, to embrace him.

He rose now to his feet, swaying unsteadily. "The day, the day," he muttered, "the day." He moved unsteadily towards the door, fumbling with the mechanism of his boots, dragging his feet forward.

Bigend saw him and gave an order. "The ice shall be water," he crooned, stumbling forward, "the day shall be home."

Bigend, Piston, Crank and Sump rose to their feet and pointed towards him. He fell dead across the threshold, his arms stretched forward. His feet were still in the room, but outside the gutter water eddied about his face and his fingers.

Inside, the men were silent again. They gave up playing, the rain washed the silent barmaid's face and ran across the gleaming counter soaking into the floor.

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A long time ago (April, 1951, to be exact), F&SF brought you Alan Nelson's Narapoia, *in which the helpless psychiatrist Manly J. Departure encountered the strange case of the young man with the opposite of paranoia, who was convinced that he was following someone and that people were plotting to do him good. For some time Dr. Departure's life has been relatively tranquil (partly because of an enforced vacation brought on by the narapoia incident); but now Mr. Nelson reveals, with his usual deadpan wit and lively sense of absurdity, another topsy-turvy mental illness and its effect upon the good doctor's career.*

The Shopdropper

by ALAN NELSON

'I'M A KLEPTO-KLEPTOMANIAC, Doctor." Dr. Manly J. Departure, bursting with vitamins and energy after his year's leave of absence, gazed with professional cordiality at the angular young man across the desk who was kneading preposterously long fingers and scowling.

"Well, that's not too serious, Mr. Flint," Dr. Departure replied, permitting himself an affable chuckle. "There seems to be a lot of kleptomania going around this season. As for the stuttering . . ."

Mr. Flint did not smile.

"Not kleptomania, Doctor. *Klepto*-kleptomania." The young man continued to massage his fingers as though smoothing out invisible wrinkles. "I steal only from other kleptomaniacs, he said earnestly."

Dr. Departure's chuckle dribbled away.

"If I understand you," Dr. Departure began very slowly, "you have a pathological impulse to steal. But instead of stealing from department stores as does the normal kleptom . . . rather, the *usual* kleptomaniac, you feel impelled to steal the things other kleptomaniacs have already stolen?"

"That's right," the man answered. "I sneak into their rooms when they're out. They're getting harder and harder to find, too. Of course it's all stuff I have no particular use for. Look!"

He reached down, hauled up a bulky paper sack and handed it across the desk. Dr. Departure opened it and extracted, among

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other things, an egg beater, a plastic thimble, a pencil sharpener, a bottle of permanent wave lotion and an ocarina.

"I just . . . just can't help myself, Doctor." Flint flexed his long lean fingers, frowned at them, then looked up once more at the doctor. "This urge I get — it's irresistible. And getting worse all the time. You've got to help me."

Dr. Departure laid the bag down and began running his finger over the small brass clock his wife had given him for Christmas; it always steadied him to focus his attention a moment or so on the little instrument ticking off the dollars like a taxi meter. Presently he lifted his eyes and studied the man: thin pallid face, a shaving cut over the adam's apple, conservative dresser. Nothing remarkable except his preoccupation with those very long fingers.

"Just a few routine questions, first," Dr. Departure said, picking up a pencil.

Flint, it turned out, was 37, graduated from high school, employed as an insurance clerk, unmarried. All very usual.

At the end of the hour the doctor arose and smiled reassuringly.

"Shall we say Tuesday at 10?" he said, seeing Flint to the door.

Shortly before 10 the following Tuesday, as Dr. Departure stepped out of the elevator to keep his appointment with Flint, he bumped into his brother-in-law, Dr. Bert Schnappenhocker, a tall, assertive psychiatrist with aggressive front teeth and iron gray hair, who specialized in rich divorcees, and whose very presence in the office adjoining his own caused Departure a kind of permanent, bristling hostility. If it weren't for the fact he was Emily's brother . . .

"Glad to see you back, Manly," Schnappenhocker boomed in that loathsome, hearty voice. "How'd they treat you at the asylum?"

"It was a rest home," Dr. Departure replied coldly, moving down the hall toward his own office.

"Well, if you begin to feel shaky again, feel free to drop in. Professional discount, of course." He laughed raucously and pounded Departure on the shoulder. "By the way, did I tell you I'm speaking before the Institute of Psychiatry banquet next month? Hope you can make it."

Quack! Dr. Departure muttered angrily, closing the door against Schnappenhocker's imbecilic and tuneless whistle outside. Then, shaking off his irritation, he called Flint in from the waiting room.

"Now!" he began brightly, after Flint seated himself and placed another bulky paper sack down beside the desk. "Now, about this . . . this kleptomania." He refused to utter that ridiculous word *klepto-kleptomania*. Since Flint's first visit, he'd been unable to find anything in the literature to cover the problem, but at length he reassured him-

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self the thing wasn't as weird as it first appeared; after all, kleptomania was kleptomania, no matter who it was you stole from — possibly this man's case might be a little more complicated, that was all.

"I'd like you to start at the beginning, if you will, Mr. Flint, and tell me how this problem got started."

Flint looked troubled and poked the trinket-filled bag with his foot.

"It's the gloves," he said. "Never had any trouble until I started wearing the gloves. Then I began having this urge to snatch things off department store counters. Didn't take two weeks, though, until I couldn't get any kicks out of that any more. Then I started on the kleptos. . . ."

Dr. Departure smiled and felt the problem begin to unravel right then and there. So typical, this childish process of blaming inanimate objects for our own defects. Just last night his little niece had accused her rag doll of shattering the vase.

"Where are these gloves?" he inquired kindly.

Flint lifted his hands above the desk.

"I have them on," he said.

Dr. Departure blinked, leaned forward and gazed at the long, pink hands with the wrinkled knuckles, tapering fingers and well care-for finger nails. They were as naked as billiard balls.

"I don't see any gloves," the doctor said in a moment.

"I know," Flint replied evenly. "They're invisible."

Ah, the pieces are beginning to fall into place, Dr. Departure thought. A case of guilt projection complicated by delusionary ideas. Ten to one there will be some flights of fantasy involving sorcery showing up soon.

"Where did you get these . . . these gloves?" he asked in a soft persuasive voice.

"I bought them from a gypsy who bought them from a three-fingered Brazilian witch doctor named Bessie."

"And where did the witch doctor get them?"

"She brewed them out of a stunted guayule bush that had been struck twice by lightning and injected three times with the blood of an insane virgin."

"And what was the . . . the purpose of these gloves?"

"To make it easier for the witch doctor's son to steal pigeon eggs." Flint looked away with troubled eyes. "The gloves are defective though. They're too strong."

This could go on forever, Dr. Departure thought sadly. If I ask him why he simply doesn't take the gloves off, he'll say he can't get them off.

"The worst of it is, Doctor — I can't get them off. See?" Flint raised one hand, plucked futilely at the pink skin with the thumb and forefinger of the other. Suddenly, he leaned across the desk confidentially. "There's only one way they'll come off, Doctor."

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"And what's that?"

"First I have to find a witch doctor who ranks as high in *his* community as Bessie does in hers. That's you."

"Now, just a moment!" Dr. Departure protested huffily.

From his pocket Flint whipped a piece of paper and a small box of white powder which he laid before the doctor.

"Then I have to get you to sprinkle this powder over the gloves while saying these words and making a gesture like this. After that I can peel them right off."

"Please!" Dr. Departure said firmly, holding up his hand. He'd had quite enough of invisible gloves — except, of course, in a symbolic sense.

"Let me tell *you* how to get those . . . those invisible gloves off." He paused, polished his glasses, cleared his throat and glanced oratorically at the ceiling. "First, what do the gloves represent? Nothing more than . . ."

For a solid hour, Dr. Departure probed, prodded and pronounced. He spoke eloquently on phobias; on fantasies; on fixations; and the little brass clock jumped when he pounded the table for emphasis. Flint watched and listened intently, then at last when Dr. Departure paused to wipe his forehead and glance significantly at his watch, he leaned forward.

"That's all very well, Doctor," he said. "But are you, or are you not, going to cast this spell?"

These things take time, Dr. Departure told himself wearily. Time and patience . . .

"Because if you're not," Flint continued, half rising from the chair. "I'm going some place else. There's another man down the hall here. A Dr. Schnapp . . . Schnappen . . ."

Hastily, Dr. Departure motioned the man back into the chair. Every time he'd lost a patient to Dr. Schnappenhocker, his brother-in-law through some fantastic freak of luck had been able to clear up the problem in practically no time. The crowing that went on afterwards was unbearable. The man had even written up one case for the *American Journal*.

Dr. Departure looked distastefully at the box of powder and studied the words on the slip of paper. Well, if he had to demonstrate the impotence of spell casting, he had to — that was all.

"If I cast this . . . this spell," he finally said, trying to get a deeper meaning into the words, "will you promise to really *try* to remove these imaginary gloves — shed them like you would so much dead skin — skin you no longer need?"

"Yes! Yes!" Flint agreed eagerly.

"EEDO! QUEEDO! SKIZZO LIBIDO!" Dr. Departure intoned, sprinkling powder over Flint's outstretched hands and making a certain gesture with his own. Then he sat back and smiled indulgently.

"Thanks!" Flint breathed grate-

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fully. Then with a *zip-snick-snap!* he deftly peeled a transparent rubbery glove from each hand quite as if he were shedding so much dead skin, and tossed them both on the desk. In amazement, Dr. Departure gazed at this tiny mound of sheer limp rubber that had collapsed his psychological house of cards with such a nasty little plop.

"This should cover the fee," Flint was saying happily, placing three twenties on the blotter. "And thanks again." He went out, slamming the door.

Dr. Departure closed his eyes a moment and listened to the tick of the brass clock. Of course the man could be perpetrating an elaborate practical joke. It was even possible that that loud-mouth charlatan, that hand holder of rich nymphomaniacs, that psychoanalytical peeping tom, Dr. Schnappenhocker had put him up to it. No, on second thought it couldn't have been a practical joke. No one — not even Bert Schnappenhocker himself — would be willing to pay $25 an hour for that meager pleasure.

He picked up one glove and examined it. It was inside out now — peeling it off had done that — but both sides seemed practically the same. Never had he touched anything so wonderfully soft and delicate, so light and completely transparent! He turned it over and over. It had no more body than a cobweb, yet it was as resilient as a rubber girdle. He put his fingers into it tentatively. Remarkable how snug and comfortable it was! He pulled it completely on. Why you scarcely knew it was there! He picked up the other glove, pulled it on too. . . .

The reason I can't get these gloves off, Dr. Departure told himself the next day staring at his fingers, is that the rubber sticks so close to the skin I can't get a good grip on it. If only I had longer finger nails.

The door opened suddenly and through it popped the beaming face of Dr. Schnappenhocker.

"Morning, Manly!" he boomed. "Just out drumming up a little business and right off I thought of you." He laughed heartily.

"Don't you ever knock?" Dr. Departure growled.

"No offense, Doctor. Thought I'd leave you a program for next month's Institute banquet. Did I tell you I was guest speaker?" He dropped a folder on the chair and disappeared.

Dr. Departure turned his attention back to the gloves. It *was* odd he couldn't get them off. Very odd. Not that this bothered him particularly — they were so snug and light you scarcely knew you had them on. Tonight he'd get Emily to peel them off. It *was* a bit disconcerting, though not to be able to do it yourself.

Of course he'd had no impulse toward kleptomania — absolutely none at all. He smiled to himself. As a matter of fact — if you permitted yourself such a wild thought — it was just the other way around.

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Last night he'd left a book on the bus and this morning he'd misplaced his favorite pipe in the coffee shop. Odd. Very odd.

His eyes drifted to the two sacks of stolen articles Flint had left. Have to return *those*, he told himself — not good to have them lying around. He scooped up the bags and pawing through them discovered from price tags that most of them came from Snow Brothers' Department Store. It was lunch time; he'd drop them off right now.

A pre-inventory sale was raging in Snow Brothers'; its aisles throbbed with a squirming horde of women shoppers, and Dr. Departure, hugging two paper sacks, burrowed his way determinedly toward the accommodation desk.

It was in Women's Purses that the whim suddenly seized him. He fought it off. It returned — more powerfully, more insistently — and in a moment it swelled into a wild, unreasoning, clamoring urge that made his fingers tingle and his whole body quiver.

He found himself edging over to a counter, reaching into the sack he carried. His breathing came faster as he removed the first article his fingers touched — a windshield wiper. Furtively, he looked about. No one was watching. With a quick darting motion he sneaked the wiper between two leather bags on the counter. Then glancing nervously about once more, he hurried away with a pounding heart, feeling an odd tingling triumph.

"Opposite of kleptomania — that's what you have!" Mrs. Departure was accusing her husband in a loud hysterical voice two weeks later at dinner time. She was a large resolute woman with steely eyes and sensible shoes. At the moment, however, she was considerably unstrung. "You're an *un*-kleptomaniac, and you've *got* to do something about it!"

"And I tell you it's these damn gloves!" the doctor shouted pacing back and forth. His dinner lay cold and untouched. His hair was rumpled. His eyes glittered with strange lights. His hands had a strange plucking motion one against the other.

"You shoplifter . . . I mean . . . you shopdropper!" Her long, usually solid jaw quivered with anguish. "Sneaking into department stores, leaving trinkets all over the place. My blue vase! The pruning shears! Almost the entire silverware set! Even your little brass clock! All gone!"

"It's the gloves, I tell you!" Vainly he tugged, plucked and snatched at his finger tips. "I put them on backwards. Inside out! . . . Damn! If I could only get a grip on them!"

"And today the public library called again," she cried shrilly. "Not a day passes but what you sneak three or four of your own books onto their shelves!"

"Well, if you'd helped me get these things off that first night like I

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asked you to, maybe I wouldn't be in this fix!"

"But this evening!" Mrs. Departure's lips twitched, her voice shrilled ever higher. "On the bus — that was the last straw! I saw you with my own eyes! The way you sneaked that man's wallet out of his pocket, stuffed it with four of your own dollar bills, then put it back! I tell you, Manly, you've got to see some one!"

"And I tell you there's nothing wrong with me! It's the gloves! When Flint skinned them off, it turned them inside out. They're on backwards! Can't you get that through your head!" He jammed a cigarette in his mouth.

"Gloves! Gloves! Gloves! I tell you for the hundredth time you haven't any gloves on!"

"Where *is* that cigarette lighter," Dr. Departure growled, slapping his pockets. "I had it right in my vest this morning."

"The question is," she said, laughing a-bit hysterically and throwing back the flaps of his coat, "where is your vest? . . . Manly, I might as well tell you — I've already made an appointment for you. Tomorrow."

She dug in her purse and handed him a card.

"Schnappenhocker!" he screamed.

"Bert was really very nice about it."

"I will *not* go to that revolting brother of yours," Dr. Departure shrieked, turning a shiny purple. "Not even if he was the last doctor on earth! That pompous witch doctor! That . . ." Suddenly in mid-sentence he let out his breath and stared into space a moment, a pleased and reflective expression beginning to relax his face. Witch doctor? There was still a little powder left. . . . Why hadn't he thought of palming the gloves off on Bert before? That loud mouth wit-snapper was always trying on other people's garments for a laugh — ladies' hats, little boys' bow ties, Dr. Departure's own rather conservative rain shoes. The man simply couldn't *resist* a pair of rubber gloves!

"You will go," his wife was saying in a low vibrant voice.

"Most certainly I will go!" Dr. Departure replied in an equally vibrant voice, the sweet smile of anticipation growing on his face.

Never were doctor and patient ever happier to see one another than the following day when Dr. Departure entered the softly shaded inner sanctum of Dr. Bert Schnappenhocker. Dr. Schnappenhocker beamed at his rival with the undisguised eagerness of an anatomy student about to dissect an especially interesting species of tailless amphibia, while Dr. Departure gazed back with the smirky innocence of one all set to administer an emotional hot-foot. For two full minutes they wrung each other's hands.

"Well!" Dr. Schnappenhocker finally said heartily, impatient to

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make the initial incision. "Emily tells me you have a little problem."

"I hate to bother you with it, really," Dr. Departure replied, trying to keep from grinning.

For almost an hour Dr. Departure allowed his brother-in-law to worm the whole unlikely story out of him, then finally when he gave the instructions and pushed the little box of white powder across the desk, he watched Schnappenhocker shake his head with a coy gesture of hopelessness and settle back in his chair.

"Manly, old man," Schnappenhocker said. "Another six months of absolute rest and quiet ought to do it for you. Maybe eight. You owe it to Emily, you know. *And* to yourself." He reached for the telephone.

Dr. Departure was prepared for this. Wild lights shining from his eyes — or what he *hoped* were wild lights — he leapt from the chair, seized the copper letter opener and leaned across the desk breathing hard.

"Are you going to cast that spell or aren't you!" he shouted, digging the opener into the mahogany desk top.

Dr. Schnappenhocker blinked apprehensively.

"Sure, Manly. Sure!" he placated. "I'll cast the spell, *then* I'll make your reservation." He picked up the box of powder and glanced nervously at the slip of paper.

"EEDO! SQUEEDO! SKIZZO LIBIDO!"

With a *zip-snick-snap!* Dr. Departure peeled off the glove from the left hand. Then, as he fumbled with the right hand, an agonizing decision suddenly leapt out at him: should he make a shoplifter out of his brother-in-law, or a shopdropper? Should he leave the gloves right side out or wrong side-out? Each alternative offered such dazzling possibilities that for a moment Dr. Departure felt himself almost torn in two by the exquisite but mutually exclusive choices. Then the answer came to him. What if he left one glove right side out, the other wrong side out . . . ?

"Why Bert!" Mrs. Departure said, opening the door to her brother Dr. Schnappenhocker a week later. "Come on in!"

"I can't," Dr. Schnappenhocker replied, handing her a cardboard carton filled with assorted articles. "Just thought I'd drop these off. They're a few more things Manly deposited in my office when he was . . . well, before I cured him."

Mrs. Departure took the carton.

"I must say you're a miracle man, Bert. Just one treatment and now he's as fit as a fiddle."

"It was nothing," Schnappenhocker said, backing down the steps nervously. There was a tenseness about his eyes and he kept jerking at the ends of his fingers.

Mrs. Departure closed the door and returned to the dining room where her husband was wolfing down a tremendous dinner.

"That was Bert," she explained.

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"With another carton of junk. You know, I'm worried about the man. He keeps bringing all this stuff over here insisting it's yours, but it all belongs to him! Here's his fountain pen, his copper letter opener, even his appointment book! And what makes it even stranger," she went on, shaking her head, "every time he deposits a load, he manages to sneak off with an armful of *our* stuff!"

She went to the window and peeked through the Venetian blinds. "Look at him out there! Unscrewing the nozzle of the hose! Why, the man's turning into a human pack rat!"

"Probably been working too hard on that speech," Dr. Departure said, beaming and helping himself to another pork chop. "Always knew Schnappenhocker would crack up someday."

Coming Next Month

Our next issue, on the stands in early January, will feature a complete short novel by Marion Zimmer Bradley, whose *Centaurus Changeling* was one of 1954's most popular stories. In her new novel, *The Climbing Wave*, Mrs. Bradley brings a new and unexpected development to the theme of man's return to Earth after his first voyage to the stars, in a story rich both in detailed thinking and in warm human interest. Other stories will include a fresh light satire by Mildred Clingerman, a fascinating study of a Martian life-form by Leigh Brackett, and another adventure (possibly the eeriest yet!) of Manly Wade Wellman's John the ballard singer. And don't miss the second part of Martin Gardner's biography of L. Frank Baum, including a complete descriptive list of all the Oz books and the little known, but often excellent Baum fantasies on other themes.

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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITOR

OCCASIONALLY A REPRINT MAY BE more important than any new publication, because the book in question was originally written out of due time, and only now, many years later, is the general reader prepared to accept it for the masterpiece which it is.

A classic example is Georg Büchner's celebrated play WOZZECK, which created expressionistic drama a full hundred years before audiences were ready to enjoy it. More recently, and with a shorter time-lag, Josephine Tey began, in 1928, to write detective novels which so consummately foreshadowed the future developments of the form that they had to wait a quarter of a century to be fully enjoyed; her first novel seemed a failure upon original appearance, and a brilliant triumph upon recent reissue.

The outstanding instance in our own field is William Sloane's just-republished TO WALK THE NIGHT (Dodd, Mead, $2.75*). This appeared originally in 1937, when science fiction was unheard of (aside from H. G. Wells) in hard covers, and when literacy and novelistic insight were unheard of in magazine science fiction. A small core of sympathetic specialists clasped the book to their hearts (it has turned up regularly on all symposia of The Best Science Fiction Books); but general readers and reviewers were wholly baffled. What was one to make of a book which starts off like a mystery novel, and uses scientific detection to drive one further and further from any "rational" solution and deeper into a maze of interstellar horror? And which does this, moreover, not on any crude thriller-level, but with rich warm character-drawing, disturbing subtlety, and a splendid sense of vast beauty in the midst of terror?

Today Mr. Sloane's classic should easily find its audience — particularly with the aid of Basil Davenport's excellent historical preface. As of 1937, it's an extraordinary, even epoch-making achievement; as of 1954, it's still one of the most exciting and moving of the year's novels of the imagination.

Striking evidence of the general recognition which s.f. is now attaining is the fact that the latest edition of that standard compendium of children's literature, THE CHILDREN'S HOUR (Spencer), has

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added, as its sixteenth and final volume, an anthology of science fiction. Edited by Marjorie Barrows, it's an oddly mixed collection, ranging from boys'-magazine stuff which seems pretty spoon-fed even for a juvenile audience to simple but mature and representative stories by Bill Brown and Robert A. Heinlein. I rather doubt its appeal to the child who has already discovered s.f. on his (or indeed her) own; but it should provide a tempting easy introduction for a whole generation of new readers.

The latest adult anthology is somewhat disappointing — possibly because I expect too much of Frederik Pohl on the basis of his previous well-above-average collections. In ASSIGNMENT IN TOMORROW (Hanover, $2.95*), Mr. Pohl has not achieved more than a medium-satisfactory book — some stories previously anthologized (including a firstrate short novel by H. L. Gold), some apparently chosen only because of the author's name (including an unfortunate juvenile effort by Ray Bradbury), and some discoveries ranging from good to excellent. The size of the book (16 stories, almost 120,000 words) and two wholly admirable novelets by Alfred Bester and Philip José Farmer, each curiously mingling adventure with psychological significance, tip the balance toward a recommended purchase.

The best anthology value this month is a reprint, Philip Van Doren Stern's GREAT TALES OF FANTASY AND IMAGINATION (Cardinal-Pocket Books, 35c). Originally published in 1943 as THE MOONLIGHT TRAVELLER, this remains one of the best anthologies of the imagination ever edited, rarely equaled in literary quality, originality of concepts, or novelty of selections. Another reprint anthology, Allan Barnard's THE HARLOT KILLER (Dell, 25c), contains two fantasies (by Robert Bloch and Kay Rogers) among its thirteen factual and fictional entries upon the legendary career of Jack the Ripper.

In unanthologized short fiction, Margaret Irwin's BLOODSTOCK AND OTHER STORIES (Harcourt, Brace, $3*) is outstanding; almost half the book is devoted to a group of "Uncanny Stories," including *The Earlier Service* (F&SF, December, 1951), all exemplifying Miss Irwin's unparalleled command of supernatural subtlety and vividly detailed historical backgrounds. ASSIGNMENT IN ETERNITY (Signet, 25c) is a reprint of last year's collection of four Heinlein novelets, none of them near the level of his best work, but a readable enough lot with a few striking highspots.

Bergen Evans' THE SPOOR OF SPOOKS AND OTHER NONSENSE (Knopf, $4.50*) contains less debunking of supernatural and quasi-scientific beliefs than its title and jacket would indicate; but I hope that none of you will miss its devastating analyses of Henry Gross's dowsing and

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Dr. Rhine's ESP. And even though Mr. Evans is at times as avidly and tryingly skeptical as his antagonists are credulous, you'll enjoy the wit and perception of many other passages, especially an extraordinary study of the destructive effect of the automobile upon civilization.

Arthur C. Clarke's GOING INTO SPACE (Harper, $2.50*), is exactly what one might expect: the best yet of the many primers on spaceflight written for teen-agers or adult novices. Readers of this magazine may well prefer Clarke's earlier and fuller books, but should remember this as the perfect Christmas present for indoctrinating that favorite nephew with the probable facts of the future. Jonathan Norton Leonard's FLIGHT INTO SPACE, best of the adult presentations of the "conservative" view, is now available in a cheap edition (Signet, 25c).

The ideal Christmas present for everybody (including yourself) is Giovannetti's MAX (Macmillan, $2.95*). It was Idris Seabright who first called my attention to this wondrous beast who roams the pages of *Punch;* I was instantly converted, and have yet to find anyone who was not equally delighted by these indescribably captivating drawings. John Meredith's clever introduction describes Max as "elf, demon, child, artist, impressario, athlete, *homme du monde* . . . "; I can't do better than that — and I know it gives you no rational idea of what his cartoon-adventures are like. So please go to your favorite bookstore, peer anywhere into this volume which marks Max's American debut . . . and see if you can possibly walk out without buying it.

For readers of E. E. Smith's Lensman series, the fact is noted that the 1947–48 *Astounding* serial, CHILDREN OF THE LENS, has appeared in hard covers (Fantasy Press, $3*). I'm afraid I simply cannot read these stories, despite many efforts; but I know a number of rational people who insist that they represent the acme of hypergalactic adventure.

*Books marked with an asterisk may be ordered through F&SF'S Readers' Book Service.

New Readers' Book Service

Because bookstores are less common than they should be, and stores with a complete science-fantasy stock are even scarcer, you can now order direct from us any hard-cover book reviewed in this magazine during the past year, including this month's fine selections! (Sorry, but we cannot offer this service on paper-bound books.)

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Many of us have experimented with blends of science fiction and the detective story, but none more successfully than Isaac Asimov, especially in that almost perfect fusion, THE CAVES OF STEEL *(Doubleday, 1954). Now, in the first of a series of stories for F&SF, Mr. Asimov tries something new: an* inverted *detective story of the future, modeled upon those revolutionary detective exploits of Dr. Thorndyke's which R. Austin Freeman published as* THE SINGING BONE *(Hodder & Stoughton, 1912). Let Freeman himself describe the singular method of these stories: "The first part was a minute and detailed description of a crime. . . . The reader had seen the crime committed, knew all about the criminal, and was in possession of all the facts. It would have seemed that there was nothing left to tell. But . . . the second part, which described the investigation of the crime, had to most readers the effect of new matter. All the facts were known; but their evidential quality had not been recognized." Mr. Asimov's essay in reader-bafflement is, in its way, even trickier than those of Mr. Freeman; for he makes his puzzle hinge on a clue which can occur only in the future, yet which can be interpreted by any reader on the basis of today's knowledge! I'm happy to introduce you to Dr. Wendell Urth, extraterrologist and detective, in his first recorded case. Good luck in matching wits with him!*

The Singing Bell

by ISAAC ASIMOV

LOUIS PEYTON NEVER DISCUSSED publicly the methods by which he had bested the police of Earth in a dozen duels of wits and bluff, with the psychoprobe always waiting and always foiled. He would have been foolish to do so, of course, but in his more complacent moments, he fondled the notion of leaving a testament to be opened only after his death, one in which his unbroken success could be clearly seen to be due to ability and not to luck.

In such a testament, he would say, "No false pattern can be created to cover a crime without bearing upon it some trace of its creator. It is better, then, to seek in events some pattern that already exists and then adjust your actions to it."

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It was with that principle in mind that Peyton planned the murder of Albert Cornwell.

Cornwell, that small-time retailer of stolen things, first approached Peyton at the latter's usual table-for-one at Grinnell's. Cornwell's blue suit seemed to have a special shine, his lined face a special grin and his faded mustache a special bristle.

"Mr. Peyton," he said, greeting his future murderer with no fourth-dimensional qualm, "it is so nice to see you. I'd almost given up, sir, almost given up."

Peyton, who disliked being approached over his newspaper and dessert at Grinnell's, said, "If you have business with me, Cornwell, you know where you can reach me." Peyton was past forty and his hair was past its earlier blackness, but his back was rigid, his bearing youthful, his eyes dark, and his voice could cut the more sharply for long practice.

"Not for this, Mr. Peyton," said Cornwell, "not for this. I know of a cache, sir, a cache of . . . you know, sir." The forefinger of his right hand moved gently, as though it were a clapper striking invisible substance, and his left hand momentarily cupped his ear.

Peyton turned a page of the paper, still somewhat damp from its tele-dispenser, folded it flat and said, "Singing Bells?"

"Oh, hush, Mr. Peyton," said Cornwell, in whispered agony.

Peyton said, "Come with me."

They walked through the park. It was another Peyton axiom that to be thoroughly secret there was nothing like a low-voiced discussion out-of-doors. Any room might be spy-rayed, but no one had yet spy-rayed the vault of heaven.

Cornwell whispered, "A cache of Singing Bells; an accumulated cache of Singing Bells. Unpolished, but such beauties, Mr. Peyton."

"Have you seen them?"

"No, sir, but I have spoken with one who has. He had proofs enough to convince me. There is enough there to enable you and me to retire in affluence. In absolute affluence, sir."

"Who was this other man?"

A look of cunning lit Cornwell's face like a smoking torch, obscuring more than it showed and lending it a repulsive oiliness. "The man was a lunar grubstaker who had a method for locating the Bells in the crater sides. I don't know his method; he never told me that. But he has gathered dozens, hidden them on the moon, and come to Earth to arrange the disposing of them."

"He died, I suppose?"

"Yes. A most shocking accident, Mr. Peyton. A fall from a height. Very sad. Of course, his activities on the moon were quite illegal. The Dominion is very strict about unauthorized Bell-mining. So perhaps it was a judgment upon him after all. . . . In any case, I have his map."

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Peyton said, a look of calm indifference on his face, "I don't want any of the details of your little transaction. What I want to know is why you've come to me."

Cornwell said, "Well, now, there's enough for both of us, Mr. Peyton, and we can both do our bit. For my part, I know where the cache is located and I can get a spaceship. You —"

"Yes?"

"You can pilot a spaceship, and you have such excellent contacts for disposing of the Bells. It is a very fair division of labor, Mr. Peyton. Wouldn't you say so, now?"

Cornwell considered the pattern of his life — the pattern that already existed — and matters seemed to fit.

He said, "We will leave for the moon on August tenth."

Cornwell stopped walking and said, "Mr. Peyton! It's only April now."

Peyton maintained an even gait and Cornwell had to hurry to catch up. "Do you hear me, Mr. Peyton?"

Peyton said, "August tenth. I will get in touch with you at the proper time, tell you where to bring your ship. Make no attempt to see me personally till then. Good-bye, Cornwell."

Cornwell said, "Fifty-fifty?"

"Quite," said Peyton. "Good-bye."

Peyton continued his walk alone and considered the pattern of his life again. At the age of twenty-seven, he had bought a tract of land in the Rockies on which some past owner had built a house designed as refuge against the threatened atomic wars of two centuries back, the ones that had never come to pass after all. The house remained, however, a monument to a frightened drive for self-sufficiency.

It was of steel and concrete in as isolated a spot as could well be found on Earth, set high above sea level and protected on nearly all sides by mountain peaks that reached higher still. It had its self-contained power unit, its water supply fed by mountain streams, its freezers in which ten sides of beef could hang comfortably, its cellar outfitted like a fortress with an arsenal of weapons designed to stave off hungry, panicked hordes that never came. It had its air-conditioning unit that could scrub and scrub the air until anything *but* radioactivity (alas for human frailty) could be scrubbed out of it.

In that house of survival, Peyton passed the month of August every subsequent year of his perennially bachelor life. He took out the communicators, the television, the newspaper tele-dispenser. He built a force-field fence about his property and left a short-distance signal mechanism to the house from the point where the fence crossed the one trail winding through the mountains.

For one month each year, he could be thoroughly alone. No one

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saw him, no one could reach him. In absolute solitude, he could have the only vacation he valued after eleven months of contact with a humanity for which he could feel only a cold contempt.

Even the police (and Peyton smiled) knew of his rigid regard for August. He had once jumped bail and risked the psychoprobe rather than forego his August.

Peyton considered another aphorism for possible inclusion in his testament: There is nothing so conducive to an appearance of innocence as the triumphant lack of an alibi.

On July 30, as on July 30 of every year, Louis Peyton took the 9:15 A.M. non-grav strato-jet at New York and arrived in Denver at 12:30 P.M. There he lunched and took the 1:45 P.M. semi-grav bus to Hump's Point, from which Sam Leibman took him by ancient ground-car (full grav!) up the trail to the boundaries of his property. Sam Leibman gravely accepted the ten dollar tip that he always received, touched his hat as he had done on July 30 for fifteen years.

On July 31, as on July 31 of every year, Louis Peyton returned to Hump's Point in his non-grav aero-flitter, and placed an order through the Hump's Point general store for such supplies as he needed for the coming month. There was nothing unusual about the order. It was virtually the duplicate of previous such orders.

MacIntyre, manager of the store, checked gravely over the list, put it through to Central Warehouse (Mountain District) in Denver, and the whole of it came pushing over the mass-transference beam within the hour. Peyton loaded the supplies onto his aero-flitter with MacIntyre's help, left his usual ten dollar tip and returned to his house.

On August 1, at 12:01 A.M., the force-field that surrounded his property was set to full power and Peyton was isolated.

And now the pattern changed. Deliberately, he had left himself eight days. In that time, he slowly and meticulously, destroyed just enough of his supplies to account for all of August. He used the dusting chambers which served the house as a garbage-disposal unit. They were of an advanced model capable of reducing all matter up to and including metals and silicates to an impalpable and undetectable molecular dust. The excess energy formed in the process was carried away by the mountain stream that ran through his property. It ran five degrees warmer than normal for a week.

On August 9, his aero-flitter carried him to a spot in Wyoming where Albert Cornwell and a spaceship waited. The spaceship, itself, was a weak point, of course, since there were men who had sold it, men who had transported it and helped prepare it for flight. All those men, however, led only as far

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as Cornwell, and Cornwell, Peyton thought (with the trace of a smile on his cold lips), would be a dead end. A very dead end.

On August 10, the spaceship, with Peyton at the controls and Cornwell (and his map) as passenger, left the surface of Earth. Its non-grav field was excellent. At full power, the ship's weight was reduced to less than an ounce. The micropiles fed energy efficiently and noiselessly, and without flame or sound, the ship rose through the atmosphere, shrank to a point and was gone.

It was very unlikely that there would be witnesses to the flight. In point of fact, there were none.

Two days in space; now two weeks on the moon. Almost instinctively, Peyton had allowed for those two weeks from the first. He was under no illusions as to the value of home-made maps by non-cartographers. Useful they might be to the designer himself, who had the help of memory. To a stranger, they could be nothing more than a cryptogram.

Cornwell showed Peyton the map for the first time only after takeoff. He smiled obsequiously. "After all, sir, this was my only trump."

"Have you checked this against the lunar charts?"

"I would scarcely know how, Mr. Peyton. I depend upon you."

Peyton stared at him coldly as he returned the map. The one certain thing upon it was Tycho Crater, the site of the buried Luna City.

In one respect, at least, astronomy was on their side. Tycho was on the daylight side of the moon at the moment. It meant that patrol ships were less likely to be out; they themselves less likely to be observed.

Peyton brought the ship down in a riskily quick non-grav landing within the safe, cold darkness of the inner shadow of a crater. The sun was past zenith and the shadow would grow no shorter.

Cornwell drew a long face. "Dear, dear, Mr. Peyton. We can scarcely go prospecting in the lunar day."

"The lunar day doesn't last forever," said Peyton shortly. "There are about a hundred hours of sun left. We can use that time for acclimating ourselves and for working out the map."

The answer came quickly, but it was plural. Peyton studied the lunar charts over and over, taking meticulous measurements, and trying to find the pattern of craters shown on the home-made scrawl that was the key to — what?

Finally, Peyton said, "The crater we want could be any one of three: GC-3, GC-5 or MT-10."

"What do we do, Mr. Peyton?" asked Cornwell, anxiously.

"We try them all," said Peyton, "beginning with the nearest."

The terminator passed and they were in the night shadow. After that, they spent increasing periods on the lunar surface, getting used to the eternal silence and blackness,

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the harsh points of the stars and the crack of light that was the Earth peeping over the rim of the crater above. They left hollow, featureless footprints in the dry dust that did not stir or change. Peyton noted them first when they climbed out of the crater into the full light of the gibbous Earth. That was on the eighth day after their arrival on the moon.

The lunar cold put a limit to how long they could remain outside their ship at any one time. Each day, however, they managed for longer. By the eleventh day after arrival they had eliminated GC-5 as the container of the Singing Bells.

By the fifteenth day, Peyton's cold spirit had grown warm with desperation. It would have to be GC-3. MT-10 was too far away. They would not have time to reach it and explore it and still allow for a return to Earth by August 31.

On that same fifteenth day, however, despair was laid to rest forever when they discovered the Bells.

They were not beautiful. They were merely irregular masses of gray rock, as large as a double fist, vacuum-filled and feather-light in the moon's gravity. There were two dozen of them, and each one, after proper polishing, could be sold for a hundred thousand dollars at least.

Carefully, in double handfuls, they carried the Bells to the ship, bedded them in excelsior, and returned for more. Three times they made the trip both ways over ground that would have worn them out on Earth but which, under the moon's lilliputian gravity, was scarcely a barrier.

Cornwell passed the last of the Bells up to Peyton, who placed them carefully within the outer lock.

"Keep them clear, Mr. Peyton," he said, his radioed voice sounding harshly in the other's ear. "I'm coming up."

He crouched for the slow high leap against lunar gravity, looked up, and froze in panic. His face, clearly visible through the hard curved lusilite of his helmet froze in a last grimace of terror. "No, Mr. Peyton. Don't —"

Peyton's fist tightened on the grip of the blaster he held. It fired. There was an unbearably brilliant flash and Cornwell was a dead fragment of a man, sprawled amid remnants of a spacesuit and flecked with freezing blood.

Peyton paused to stare somberly at the dead man, but only for a second. Then he transferred the last of the Bells to their prepared containers, removed his suit, activated first the non-grav field, then the micropiles and, potentially a million or two richer than he had been two weeks earlier, set off on the return trip to Earth.

On the 29th of August, Peyton's ship descended silently, stern bottomward, to the spot in Wyoming from which it had taken off on

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August 10th. The care with which Peyton had chosen the spot was not wasted. His aero-flitter was still there, drawn within the protection of an enclosing wrinkle of the rocky, tortuous countryside.

He moved the Singing Bells once again, in their containers, into the deepest recess of the wrinkle, covering them, loosely and sparsely, with earth. He returned to the ship once more to set the controls and make last adjustments. He climbed out again, and two minutes later, the ship's automatics took over.

Silently hurrying, the ship bounded upward and up, veering to westward somewhat as the Earth rotated beneath it. Peyton watched, shading his narrowed eyes, and at the extreme edge of vision there was a tiny gleam of light and a dot of cloud against the blue sky.

Peyton's mouth twitched into a smile. He had judged well. With the cadmium safety-rods bent back into uselessness, the micropiles had plunged past the unit-sustaining safety level and the ship had vanished in the heat of the nuclear explosion that had followed.

Twenty minutes later, he was back on his property. He was tired and his muscles ached under Earth's unit gravity. He slept well.

Twelve hours later, in the earliest dawn, the police came.

PART 2

The man who opened the door placed his crossed hands over his paunch and ducked his smiling head two or three times in greeting. The man who entered, H. Seton Davenport of the Terrestrial Bureau of Investigation, looked about uncomfortably.

The room he had entered was large and in semi-darkness except for the brilliant viewing lamp focused over a combination armchair-desk. Rows of book-films covered the walls. A suspension of Galactic charts occupied one corner of the room and a Galactic Lens gleamed softly on a stand in another corner.

"You are Dr. Wendell Urth?" asked Davenport, in a tone that suggested he found it hard to believe. Davenport was a stocky man with black hair, a thin and prominent nose and a star-shaped scar on one cheek which marked permanently the place where a neuronic whip had once struck him at too close a range.

"I am," said Dr. Urth, in a thin, tenor voice. "And you are Inspector Davenport."

The Inspector presented his credentials, and said, "The University recommended you to me as an extraterrologist."

"So you said when you called me half an hour ago," said Urth, agreeably. His features were thick, his nose was a snubby button, and over his somewhat protuberant eyes there were thick glasses.

"I shall get to the point, Dr. Urth. I presume you have visited the moon —"

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Dr. Urth, who had brought out a bottle of ruddy liquid and two glasses, just a little the worse for dust, from behind a straggling pile of book-films, said with sudden brusqueness, "I have never visited the moon, Inspector. I never intend to! Space-travel is foolishness. I don't believe in it." Then, in softer tones, "Sit down, sir, sit down. Have a drink."

Inspector Davenport did as he was told and said, "But you're an—"

"Extraterrologist. Yes. I'm interested in other worlds, but it doesn't mean I have to go there. Good Lord, I don't have to be a time-traveler to qualify as a historian, do I?" He sat down, and a broad smile impressed itself upon his round face once more as he said, "Now tell me what's on your mind."

"I have come," said the Inspector, frowning, "to consult you in a case of murder."

"Murder? What have I to do with murder?"

"This murder, Dr. Urth, was on the moon."

"Astonishing."

"It's more than astonishing. It's unprecedented, Dr. Urth. In the fifty years since the Lunar Dominion has been established, ships have blown up and spacesuits have sprung leaks. Men have boiled to death on sun-side, frozen on dark-side and suffocated on both sides. There have even been deaths by falls, which, considering lunar gravity, is quite a trick. But in all that time, not one man has been killed on the Moon as the result of another man's deliberate act of violence . . . till now."

Dr. Urth said, "How was it done?"

"A blaster. The authorities were on the scene within the hour through a fortunate set of circumstances. A patrol ship observed a flash of light against the moon's surface. You know how far a flash can be seen against the night-side. He notified Luna City and landed. In the process of circling back, he swears that he just managed to see by Earthlight what looked like a ship taking off. Upon landing, he discovered a blasted corpse and footprints."

"The flash of light," said Dr. Urth, "you suppose to be the firing blaster."

"That's certain. The corpse was fresh. Interior portions of the body had not yet frozen. The footprints belonged to two people. Careful measurements showed that the depressions fell into two groups of somewhat different diameters, indicating differently sized space-boots. In the main, they led to craters GC-3 and GC-5, a pair of—"

"I am acquainted with the official code for naming lunar craters," said Dr. Urth, pleasantly.

"Umm. In any case, GC-3 contained footprints that led to a rift in the crater wall, within which scraps of hardened pumice were found. X-ray diffraction patterns showed—"

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"Singing Bells," put in the extraterrologist in great excitement. "Don't tell me this murder of yours involves Singing Bells!"

"What if it does?" demanded Davenport, blankly.

"I have one. A University expedition uncovered it and presented it to me in return for — Come, Inspector, I must show it to you."

Dr. Urth jumped up and pattered across the room, beckoning the other to follow as he did. Davenport, annoyed, followed.

They entered a second room, larger than the first, dimmer, considerably more cluttered. Davenport stared with astonishment at the heterogeneous mass of material that was jumbled together in no pretense at order.

He made out a small lump of "blue glaze" from Mars, the sort of thing some romantics considered to be an artifact of long-extinct Martians, a small meteorite, a model of an early spaceship, a sealed bottle of liquid scrawlingly labeled "Venusian ocean."

Dr. Urth said, happily, "I've made a museum of my whole house. It's one of the advantages of being a bachelor. Of course, I haven't quite got things organized. Someday, when I have a spare week or so . . ."

For a moment he looked about, puzzled, then remembering, he pushed aside a chart showing the evolutionary scheme of development of the marine invertebrates that were the highest life-forms on Arcturus V and said, "Here it is. It's flawed, I'm afraid."

The Bell hung suspended from a slender wire, soldered delicately onto it. That it was flawed was obvious. It had a constriction line running halfway about it that made it seem like two small globes, firmly but imperfectly squashed together. Despite that, it had been lovingly polished to a dull luster, softly gray, velvety smooth, and faintly pockmarked in a way that laboratories, in their futile efforts to prepare synthetic Bells, had found impossible to duplicate.

Dr. Urth said, "I experimented a good deal before I found a decent stroker. A flawed Bell is temperamental. But bone works. I have one here," and he held up something that looked like a short thick spoon made of a gray-white substance, "which I had made out of the femur of an ox. . . . Listen."

With surprising delicacy, his pudgy fingers maneuvered the Bell, feeling for one best spot. He adjusted it, steadying it daintily. Then, letting the Bell swing free, he brought down the thick end of the bone spoon and stroked the Bell softly.

It was as though a million harps had sounded a mile away. It swelled and faded and returned. It came from no particular direction. It sounded inside the head, incredibly sweet and pathetic and tremulous all at once.

It died away lingeringly and both men were silent for a full minute.

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Dr. Urth said, "Not bad, eh?" and with a flick of his hand set the Bell to swinging on its wire.

Davenport stirred restlessly, "Careful! Don't break it." The fragility of a good Singing Bell was proverbial.

Dr. Urth said, "Geologists say the Bells are only pressure-hardened pumice, enclosing a vacuum in which small beads of rock rattle freely. That's what they *say*. But if that's all it is, why can't we reproduce one? Now a flawless Bell would make this one sound like a child's harmonica."

"Exactly," said Davenport, "and there aren't a dozen people on Earth who own a flawless one, and there are a hundred people and institutions who would buy one at any price, no questions asked. A supply of Bells would be worth murder."

The extraterrologist turned to Davenport and pushed his spectacles back on his inconsequential nose with a stubby forefinger. "I haven't forgotten your murder case. Please go on."

"That can be done in a phrase. I know the identity of the murderer."

They had returned to the chairs in the library and Dr. Urth clasped his hands over his ample abdomen. "Indeed? Then surely you have no problem, Inspector."

"Knowing and proving are not the same, Dr. Urth. Unfortunately, he has no alibi."

"You mean: unfortunately he *has*, don't you?"

"I mean what I say. If he had an alibi, I could crack it somehow, because it would be a false one. If there were witnesses who claimed they had seen him on Earth at the time of the murder, their stories could be broken down. If he had documentary proof, it could be exposed as a forgery or some sort of trickery. Unfortunately, he has none of it."

"What does he have?"

Carefully, Inspector Davenport described the Peyton estate in Colorado. He concluded, "He has spent every August there in the strictest isolation. Even the T.B.I. would have to testify to that. Any jury would have to presume that he was on his estate this August as well unless we could present definite proof that he was on the moon."

"What makes you think he *was* on the moon. Perhaps he is innocent."

"No!" Davenport was almost violent. "For fifteen years I've been trying to collect sufficient evidence against him and I've never succeeded. But I can *smell* a Peyton crime now. I tell you that no one but Peyton, no one on Earth, would have the impudence or, for that matter, the practical business contacts to attempt disposal of smuggled Singing Bells. He is known to be an expert space-pilot. He is known to have had contact with the murdered man, though admittedly not for some months. Unfortunately, none of that is proof."

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Dr. Urth said, "Wouldn't it be simple to use the psychoprobe, now that it's use has been legalized?"

Davenport scowled, and the scar on his cheek turned livid. "Have you read the Konski-Hiakawa law, Dr. Urth?"

"No."

"I think no one has. The right to mental privacy, the government says, is fundamental. All right, but what follows? The man who is psychoprobed and proves innocent of the crime for which he was psychoprobed is entitled to as much compensation as he can persuade the courts to give him. In a recent case, a bank cashier was awarded $25,000 for having been psychoprobed on inaccurate suspicion of theft. It seems that the circumstantial evidence which seemed to point to theft actually pointed to a small spot of adultery. His claim that he lost his job, was threatened by the husband in question and put in bodily fear, and finally was held up to ridicule and contumely because a news-strip man had learned the results of the probe held good in court."

"I can see the man's point."

"So can we all. That's the trouble. One more item to remember: any man who has been psychoprobed once for any reason can never be psychoprobed again for any reason. No one man, the law says, shall be placed in mental jeopardy twice in his lifetime."

"Inconvenient."

"Exactly. In the two years since the psychoprobe has been legitimized, I couldn't count the number of crooks and chiselers who've tried to get themselves psychoprobed for purse-snatching so that they can play the rackets safely afterward. So you see the Department will not allow Peyton to be psychoprobed until they have firm evidence of his guilt. Not legal evidence, maybe, but evidence that is strong enough to convince my boss. The worst of it, Dr. Urth, is that if we come into court without a psychoprobe record, we can't win. In a case as serious as murder, not to have used the psychoprobe is proof enough to the dumbest juror that the prosecution isn't sure of its ground."

"Now what do you want from me?"

"Proof that he was on the moon sometime in August. It's got to be done quickly. I can't hold him on suspicion much longer. And if news of the murder gets out, the world press will blow up like an asteroid striking Jupiter's atmosphere. A glamorous crime, you know; first murder on the moon."

"Exactly when was the murder committed?" asked Urth, in a sudden transition to brisk cross-examination.

"August 27."

"And the arrest was made when?"

"Yesterday, August 30."

"Then if Peyton were the murderer, he would have had time to return to Earth."

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"Barely. Just barely." Davenport's lips thinned. "If I had been a day sooner — If I had found his place empty —"

"And how long do you suppose the two, the murdered man and the murderer, were on the Moon altogether?"

"Judging by the ground covered by the footprints, a number of days. A week, at the minimum."

"Has the ship they used been located?"

"No, and it probably never will. About ten hours ago, the University of Denver reported a rise in background radioactivity beginning day before yesterday at 6 P.M. and persisting for a number of hours. It's an easy thing, Dr. Urth, to set a ship's controls so as to allow it to blast off without crew and blow up, fifty miles high, in a micropile short."

"If I had been Peyton," said Dr. Urth, thoughtfully, "I would have killed the man on board ship and blown up corpse and ship together."

"You don't know Peyton," said Davenport, grimly. "He enjoys his victories over the law. He values them. Leaving the corpse on the moon is his challenge to us."

"I see." Dr. Urth patted his stomach with a rotary motion and said, "Well, there is a chance."

"That you'll be able to prove he was on the moon?"

"That I'll be able to give you my opinion."

"Now?"

"The sooner the better. If, of course, I get a chance to interview Mr. Peyton."

"That can be arranged. I have a non-grav jet waiting. We can be in Washington in twenty minutes."

But a look of the deepest alarm passed over the plump extraterrologist's face. He rose to his feet and pattered away from the T.B.I. agent toward the duskiest corner of the cluttered room.

"*No!*"

"What's wrong, Dr. Urth?"

"I won't use a non-grav jet. I don't believe in them."

Davenport stared confusedly at Dr. Urth. He stammered, "Would you prefer a monorail?"

Dr. Urth snapped, "I mistrust all forms of transportation. I don't believe in them. Except walking. I don't mind walking." He was suddenly eager. "Couldn't you bring Mr. Peyton to this city, somewhere within walking distance? To City Hall, perhaps? I've often walked to City Hall."

Davenport looked helplessly about the room. He looked at the myriad volumes of lore about the light-years. He could see through the open door into the room beyond with its tokens of the worlds beyond the sky. And he looked at Dr. Urth, pale at the thought of a non-grav jet, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll bring Peyton here. Right to this room. Will that satisfy you?"

Dr. Urth puffed out his breath in a deep sigh. "Quite."

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"I hope you can deliver, Dr. Urth."

"I will do my best, Mr. Davenport."

Louis Peyton stared with distaste at his surroundings and with contempt at the fat man bobbed his head in greeting. He glanced at the seat offered him and brushed it with his hand before sitting down. Davenport took a seat next to him, with his blaster-holster in clear view.

The fat man was smiling as he sat down and patted his round abdomen as though he had just finished a good meal and were intent on letting the world know about it.

He said, "Good evening, Mr. Peyton. I am Dr. Wendell Urth, extraterrologist."

Peyton looked at him again, "And what do you want with me?"

"I want to know if you were on the moon at any time in the month of August."

"I was not."

"Yet no man saw you on Earth between the days of August 1 and August 30."

"I lived my normal life in August. I am never seen during that month. Let him tell you." And he jerked his head in the direction of Davenport.

Dr. Urth chuckled. "How nice if we could test this matter. If there were only some physical manner in which we could differentiate moon from Earth. If, for instance, we could analyze the dust in your hair and say, 'Aha, moon rock.' Unfortunately, we can't. Moon rock is much the same as Earth rock. Even if it weren't, there wouldn't be any in your hair unless you stepped on to the lunar surface without a spacesuit, which is unlikely."

Peyton remained impassive.

Dr. Urth went on, smiling benevolently, and lifting a hand to steady the glasses perched precariously on the bulb of his nose. "A man traveling in space or on the moon breathes Earth air, eats Earth food. He carries Earth environment next to his skin whether he's in his ship or in his spacesuit. We are looking for a man who spent two days in space going to the moon, at least a week on the moon, and two days coming back from the moon. In all that time he carried Earth next to his skin, which makes it difficult."

"I'd suggest," said Peyton, "that you can make it less difficult by releasing me and looking for the real murderer."

"It may come to that," said Dr. Urth. "Have you ever seen anything like this?" His hand pushed its pudgy way to the ground beside his chair and came up with a gray sphere that sent back subdued highlights.

Peyton smiled, "It looks like a Singing Bell to me."

"It *is* a Singing Bell. The murder was committed for the sake of Singing Bells. . . . What do you think of this one?"

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"I think it is badly flawed."

"Ah, but inspect it," said Dr. Urth, and with a quick motion of his hand, he tossed it through six feet of air to Peyton.

Davenport cried out and half-rose from his chair. Peyton brought up his arms with an effort, but so quickly that they managed to catch the Bell.

Peyton said, "You damned fool. Don't throw it around that way."

"You respect Singing Bells, do you?"

"Too much to break one. That's no crime, at least." Peyton stroked the Bell gently, then lifted it to his ear and shook it slowly, listening to the soft clicks of the Lunoliths, those small pumice particles, as they rattled in vacuum.

Then, holding the Bell up by the length of steel wire still attached to it, he ran a thumb nail over its surface with an expert, curving motion. It twanged! The note was very mellow, very flute-like, holding with a slight *vibrato* that faded lingeringly and conjured up pictures of a summer twilight.

For a short moment, all three men were lost in the sound.

And then Dr. Urth said, "Throw it back, Mr. Peyton. Toss it here!" and held out his hand in peremptory gesture.

Automatically, Louis Peyton tossed the Bell. It traveled its short arc one third of the way to Dr. Urth's waiting hand, curved downward and shattered with a heart-broken, sighing discord on the floor.

Davenport and Peyton stared at the gray slivers with equal wordlessness and Dr. Urth's calm voice went almost unheard as he said, "When the criminal's cache of crude Bells is located, I'll ask that a flawless one, properly polished, be given to me, as replacement and fee."

"A fee? For what?" demanded Davenport, irritably.

"Surely the matter is now obvious. Despite my little speech of a moment ago, there is one piece of Earth's environment that no space traveler carries with him . . . and that is *Earth's surface gravity*. The fact that Mr. Peyton could so egregiously misjudge the toss of an object he obviously valued so highly could mean only that his muscles are not yet readjusted to the pull of Earthly gravity. It is my professional opinion, Mr. Davenport, that your prisoner has, in the last few days, been away from Earth. He has either been in space or on some planetary object considerably smaller in size than the Earth — as, for example, the moon."

Davenport rose triumphantly to his feet. "Let me have your opinion in writing," he said, hand on blaster, "and that will be good enough to get me permission to use a psycho-probe."

Louis Peyton, dazed and unresisting, had only the numb realization that any testament he could now leave would have to include the fact of ultimate failure.

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Lament by a Maker

If you want to know about me, I will tell you what I am:
I'm a science-fiction genius — all the other kinds are sham.
For I started in the era of the other-world romance,
When a hero with a broadsword faced a horde of giant ants,
Or he saved a naked princess from a fiendish Martian priest
Who fed virgins in his temple to an octopoidal beast.
But although I skewered villains till my pages ran with gore,
Yet everybody said my stuff was such a frightful bore!
And I can't think why!

Then the age of super-gadgetry. I modified my themes,
Using robots, proton-blasters, trips in time, and tractor-beams.
So my hero juggled worlds and spoke in clipped and cosmic slang,
Such as: "CQX, old reptile; how is every little fang?"
And when cornered in his space-ship by the Things from Procyon,
He destroyed them with his just-invented hyper-neurotron.
But although I switched dimensions till I stripped my spatial gears,
Yet the letter-writers said my stories bored them all to tears!
And I can't think why!

Comes the human-interest story of the psychiatric kind,
Where the hero is a maladjusted jerk of feeble mind.
Now he beats his wife and children till an altruistic Slan,
Using hypno-psionetics, makes him love his fellow-man.
So I write of twerps who weep for Mom, who slobber, twitch, and glower,
And who pull the wings off Martians by their telekinetic power.
But although I make my character the cosmos' biggest fool,
Still the readers all insist they do not want to read this drool!
And I can't think why!

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

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You have just read Isaac Asimov's fusion of science fiction and the detective story; now try another combination: the blend of a deductive puzzle with pure supernatural horror — a blend which is peculiarly John Dickson Carr's own property, as he demonstrated in that magnificent fantasy-detective novel THE BURNING COURT *(recently reprinted by Bantam). The ghost-story-for-Christmas is one of the most ancient and honorable of English-speaking customs, preeminently observed by Dickens (both as writer and as editor) and by M. R. James; here Mr. Carr adds his own typical impossible-murder problem to a ghost story in the richest Jamesian tradition — a perfect Christmas tale complete with "a bright fire . . . cold fowl on the sideboard, a great bowl of chestnuts . . ." and a specter at once pitiful and subtly terrifying.*

Blind Man's Hood

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

ALTHOUGH ONE SNOWFLAKE HAD already sifted past the lights, the great doors of the house stood open. It seemed less a snowflake than a shadow; for a bitter wind whipped after it, and the doors creaked. Inside, Rodney and Muriel Hunter could see a dingy, narrow hall paved in dull red tiles, with a Jacobean staircase at the rear. (At that time, of course, there was no dead woman lying inside.)

To find such a place in the loneliest part of the Weald of Kent — a Seventeenth-Century country house whose floors had grown humped and its beams scrubbed by the years — was what they had expected. Even to find electricity was not surprising. But Rodney Hunter thought he had seldom seen so many lights in one house, and Muriel had been equally startled by the display. "Clearlawns" lived up to its name. It stood in the midst of a slope of flat grass, now wiry white with frost, and there was no tree or shrub within twenty yards of it. Those lights contrasted with a certain inhospitable and damp air about the house, as though the owner were compelled to keep them burning all the time.

From THE DEPARTMENT OF QUEER COMPLAINTS, *by Carter Dickson; copyright, 1940, by William Morrow, Inc.*

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"But why is the front door *open*?" insisted Muriel.

In the drive-way, the engine of their car coughed and died. The house was now a secret blackness of gables, emitting light at every chink, and silhouetting the stalks of the wisteria vines which climbed it. On either side of the front door were little-paned windows whose curtains had not been drawn. Towards their left they could see into a low dining-room, with table and sideboard set for a cold supper; towards their right was a darkish library moving with the reflections of a bright fire.

The sight of the fire warmed Rodney Hunter, but it made him feel guilty. They were very late. At 5 o'clock, without fail, he had promised Jack Bannister, they would be at "Clearlawns" to inaugurate the Christmas party.

Engine-trouble in leaving London was one thing; idling at a country pub along the way, drinking hot ale and listening to the wireless sing carols until a sort of Dickensian jollity stole into you, was something else. But both he and Muriel were young; they were very fond of each other and of things in general; and they had worked themselves into a glow of Christmas, which — as they stood before the creaking doors of "Clearlawns" — grew oddly cool.

There was no real reason, Rodney thought, to feel disquiet. He hoisted their luggage, including a big box of presents for Jack and Molly's children, out of the rear of the car. That his footsteps should sound loud on the gravel was only natural. He put his head into the doorway and whistled. Then he began to bang the knocker. Its sound seemed to seek out every corner of the house and then come back like a questing dog; but there was no response.

"I'll tell you something else," he said. "There's nobody in the house."

Muriel ran up the three steps to stand beside him. She had drawn her fur coat close around her, and her face was bright with cold.

"But that's impossible!" she said. "I mean, even if they're out, the servants —! Molly told me she keeps a cook and two maids. Are you sure we've got the right place?"

"Yes. The name's on the gate, and there's no other house within a mile."

With the same impulse they craned their necks to look through the windows of the dining-room on the left. Cold fowl on the sideboard, a great bowl of chestnuts; and, now they could see it, another good fire, before which stood a chair with a piece of knitting put aside on it. Rodney tried the knocker again, vigorously, but the sound was all wrong. It was as though they were even more lonely in that core of light, with the east wind rushing across the Weald, and the door creaking again.

"I suppose we'd better go in," said Rodney. He added, with a lack

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of Christmas spirit: "Here, this is a devil of a trick! What do you think has happened? I'll swear that fire has been made up in the last fifteen minutes."

He stepped into the hall and set down the bags. As he was turning to close the door, Muriel put her hand on his arm.

"I say, Rod. Do you think you'd better close it?"

"Why not?"

"I — I don't know."

"The place is getting chilly enough as it is," he pointed out, unwilling to admit that the same thought had occurred to him. He closed both doors and shot their bar into place; and, at the same moment, a girl came out of the door to the library on the right.

She was such a pleasant-faced girl that they both felt a sense of relief. Why she had not answered the knocking had ceased to be a question; she filled a void. She was pretty, not more than twenty-one or two, and had an air of primness which made Rodney Hunter vaguely associate her with a governess or a secretary, though Jack Bannister had never mentioned any such person. She was plump, but with a curiously narrow waist; and she wore brown. Her brown hair was neatly parted, and her brown eyes — long eyes, which might have given a hint of secrecy or curious smiles if they had not been so placid — looked concerned. In one hand she carried what looked like a small white bag of linen or cotton. And she spoke with a dignity which did not match her years.

"I am most terribly sorry," she told them. "I *thought* I heard someone, but I was so busy that I could not be sure. Will you forgive me?"

She smiled. Hunter's private view was that his knocking had been loud enough to wake the dead; but he murmured conventional things. As though conscious of some faint incongruity about the white bag in her hand, she held it up.

"For Blind Man's Bluff," she explained. "They do cheat so, I'm afraid, and not only the children. If one uses an ordinary handkerchief tied round the eyes, they always manage to get a corner loose. But if you take this, and you put it fully over a person's head, and you tie it round the neck" — a sudden gruesome image occurred to Rodney Hunter — "then it works so much better, don't you think?" Her eyes seemed to turn inward, and to grow absent. "But I must not keep you talking here. You are —?"

"My name is Hunter. This is my wife. I'm afraid we've arrived late, but I understood Mr. Bannister was expecting —"

"He did not tell you?" asked the girl in brown.

"Tell me what?"

"Everyone here, including the servants, is always out of the house at this hour on this particular date. It is the custom; I believe it has been the custom for more than sixty years.

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There is some sort of special church service."

Rodney Hunter's imagination had been devising all sorts of fantastic explanations: the first of them being that this demure lady had murdered the members of the household, and was engaged in disposing of the bodies. What put this nonsensical notion into his head he could not tell, unless it was his own profession of detective-story writing. But he felt relieved to hear a commonplace explanation. Then the woman spoke again.

"Of course, it is a pretext, really. The rector, that dear man, invented it all those years ago to save embarrassment. What happened here had nothing to do with the murder, since the dates were so different; and I suppose most people have forgotten now why the tenants *do* prefer to stay away during 7 and 8 o'clock on Christmas Eve. I doubt if Mrs. Bannister even knows the real reason, though I should imagine Mr. Bannister must know it. But what happens here cannot be very pleasant, and it wouldn't do to have the children see it — would it?"

Muriel spoke with such sudden directness that her husband knew she was afraid. "Who are you?" Muriel said. "And what on earth are you talking about?"

"I am quite sane, really," their hostess assured them, with a smile that was half-cheery and half-coy. "I dare say it must be all very confusing to you, poor dear. But I am forgetting my duties. Please come in and sit down before the fire, and let me offer you something to drink."

She took them into the library on the right, going ahead with a walk that was like a bounce, and looking over her shoulder out of those long eyes. The library was a long, low room with beams. The windows towards the road were uncurtained; but those in the side-wall, where a faded red-brick fireplace stood, were bay windows with draperies closed across them. As their hostess put them before the fire, Hunter could have sworn he saw one of the draperies move.

"You need not worry about it," she assured him, following his glance towards the bay. "Even if you looked in there, you might not see anything now. I believe some gentleman did try it once, a long time ago. He stayed in the house for a wager. But when he pulled the curtain back, he did not see anything in the bay — at least, anything quite. He felt some hair, and it moved. That is why they have so many lights nowadays."

Muriel had sat down on a sofa, and was lighting a cigarette: to the rather prim disapproval of their hostess, Hunter thought.

"May we have a hot drink?" Muriel asked crisply. "And then, if you don't mind, we might walk over and meet the Bannisters coming from church."

"Oh, please don't do that!" cried the other. She had been standing

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by the fireplace, her hands folded and turned outwards. Now she ran across to sit down beside Muriel; and the swiftness of her movement, no less than the touch of her hand on Muriel's arm, made the latter draw back.

Hunter was now completely convinced that their hostess was out of her head. Why she held such fascination for him, though, he could not understand. In her eagerness to keep them there, the girl had come upon a new idea. On a table behind the sofa, book-ends held a row of modern novels. Conspicuously displayed — probably due to Molly Bannister's tact — were two of Rodney Hunter's detective stories. The girl put a finger on them.

"May I ask if you wrote these?"

He admitted it.

"Then," she said with sudden composure, "it would probably interest you to hear about the murder. It was a most perplexing business, you know; the police could make nothing of it, and no one ever has been able to solve it." An arresting eye fixed on his. "It happened out in the hall there. A poor woman was killed where there was no one to kill her, and no one could have done it. But she was murdered."

Hunter started to get up from his chair; then he changed his mind, and sat down again. "Go on," he said.

"You must forgive me if I am a little uncertain about dates," she urged. "I think it was in the early eighteen-seventies, and I am sure it was in early February — because of the snow. It was a bad winter then; the farmers' livestock all died. My people have been bred up in the district for years, and I know that. The house here was much as it is now, except that there was none of this lighting (only paraffin lamps, poor girl!); and you were obliged to pump up what water you wanted; and people read the newspaper quite through, and discussed it for days.

"The people were a little different to look at, too. I am sure I do not understand why we think beards are so strange nowadays; they seem to think that men who had beards never had any emotions. But even young men wore them then, and looked handsome enough. There was a newly married couple living in this house at the time: at least, they had been married only the summer before. They were named Edward and Jane Waycross, and it was considered a good match everywhere.

"Edward Waycross did not have a beard, but he had bushy side-whiskers which he kept curled. He was not a handsome man, either, being somewhat dry and hard-favoured; but he was a religious man, and a good man, and an excellent man of business, they say: a manufacturer of agricultural implements at Hawkhurst. He had determined that Jane Anders (as she was) would make him a good wife, and I dare say she did.

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The girl had several suitors. Although Mr. Waycross was the best match, I know it surprised people a little when she accepted him, because she was thought to have been fond of another man — a more striking man, whom many of the young girls were after. This was Jeremy Wilkes: who came of a very good family, but was considered wicked. He was no younger than Mr. Waycross, but he had a great black beard, and wore white waistcoats with gold chains, and drove a gig. Of course, there had been gossip, but that was because Jane Anders was considered pretty."

Their hostess had been sitting back against the sofa, quietly folding the little white bag with one hand, and speaking in a prim voice. Now she did something which turned her hearers cold.

You have probably seen the same thing done many times. She had been touching her cheek lightly with the fingers of the other hand. In doing so, she touched the flesh at the corner under her lower eyelid, and accidentally drew down the corner of that eyelid — which should have exposed the red part of the inner lid at the corner of the eye. It was not red. It was of a sickly pale colour.

"In the course of his business dealings," she went on, "Mr. Waycross had often to go to London, and usually he was obliged to remain overnight. But Jane Waycross was not afraid to remain alone in the house. She had a good servant, a staunch old woman, and a good dog. Even so, Mr. Waycross commended her for her courage."

The girl smiled. "On the night I wish to tell you of, in February, Mr. Waycross was absent. Unfortunately, too, the old servant was absent; she had been called away as a midwife to attend her cousin, and Jane Waycross had allowed her to go. This was known in the village, since all such affairs are well known, and some uneasiness was felt — this house being isolated, as you know. But she was not afraid.

"It was a very cold night, with a heavy fall of snow which had stopped about 9 o'clock. You must know, beyond doubt, that poor Jane Waycross was alive after it had stopped snowing. It must have been nearly half-past 9 when a Mr. Moody — a very good and sober man who lived in Hawkhurst — was driving home along the road past this house. As you know, it stands in the middle of a great bare stretch of lawn; and you can see the house clearly from the road. Mr. Moody saw poor Jane at the window of one of the upstairs bedrooms, with a candle in her hand, closing the shutters. But he was not the only witness who saw her alive.

"On that same evening, Mr. Wilkes (the handsome gentleman I spoke to you of a moment ago) had been at a tavern in the village of Five Ashes with Dr. Sutton, the local doctor, and a racing gentleman named Pawley. At about half-past 11 they started to drive home in Mr.

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Wilkes's gig to Cross-in-Hand. I am afraid they had been drinking, but they were all in their sober senses. The landlord of the tavern remembered the time because he had stood in the doorway to watch the gig, which had fine yellow wheels, go spanking away as though there were no snow; and Mr. Wilkes in one of the new round hats with a curly brim.

"There was a bright moon. 'And no danger,' Dr. Sutton always said afterwards; 'shadows of trees and fences as clear as though a silhouette-cutter had made 'em for sixpence.' But when they were passing this house Mr. Wilkes pulled up sharp. There was a bright light in the window of one of the downstairs rooms — this room, in fact. They sat out there looking round the hood of the gig, and wondering.

"Mr. Wilkes spoke: 'I don't like this,' he said. 'You know, gentlemen, that Waycross is still in London; and the lady in question is in the habit of retiring early. I am going up there to find out if anything is wrong.'

"With that he jumped out of the gig, his black beard jutting out and his breath smoking. He said: 'And if it is a burglar, then, by Something, gentlemen' — I will not repeat the word he used — 'by Something, gentlemen, I'll settle him.' He walked through the gate and up to the house — they could follow every step he made — and looked into the windows of this room here. Presently he returned looking relieved (they could see him by the light of the gig lamps), but wiping the moisture off his forehead.

" 'It is all right,' he said to them; 'Waycross has come home. But, by Something, gentlemen, he is growing thinner these days, or it is shadows.'

"Then he told them what he had seen. If you look through the front windows — there — you can look sideways and see out through the doorway into the main hall. He said he had seen Mrs. Waycross standing in the hall with her back to the staircase, wearing a blue dressing-wrap over her nightgown, and her hair down round her shoulders. Standing in front of her, with his back to Mr. Wilkes, was a tallish, thin man like Mr. Waycross, with a long greatcoat and a tall hat like Mr. Waycross's. *She* was carrying either a candle or a lamp; and he remembered how the tall hat seemed to wag back and forth, as though the man were talking to her or putting out his hands towards her. For he said he could not see the woman's face.

"Of course, it was not Mr. Waycross; but how were they to know that?

"At about 7 o'clock next morning, Mrs. Randall, the old servant, returned. (A fine boy had been born to her cousin the night before.) Mrs. Randall came home through the white dawn and the white snow, and found the house all locked up. She could get no answer to her knocking. Being a woman of great resolution, she eventually broke a window and

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got in. But, when she saw what was in the front hall, she went out screaming for help.

"Poor Jane was past help. I know I should not speak of these things; but I must. She was lying on her face in the hall. From the waist down her body was much charred and — unclothed, you know, because fire had burnt away most of the nightgown and the dressing-wrap. The tiles of the hall were soaked with blood and paraffin oil, the oil having come from a broken lamp with a thick blue silk shade which was lying a little distance away. Near it was a china candlestick with a candle. This fire had also charred a part of the panelling of the wall, and a part of the staircase. Fortunately, the floor is of brick tiles, and there had not been much paraffin left in the lamp, or the house would have been set afire.

"But she had not died from burns alone. Her throat had been cut with a deep slash from some very sharp blade. But she had been alive for a while to feel both things, for she had crawled forward on her hands while she was burning. It was a cruel death, a horrible death for a soft person like that."

There was a pause. The expression on the face of the narrator, the plump girl in the brown dress, altered slightly. So did the expression of her eyes. She was sitting beside Muriel; and moved a little closer.

"Of course, the police came. I do not understand such things, I am afraid, but they found that the house had not been robbed. They also noticed the odd thing I have mentioned, that there was both a lamp *and* a candle in a candlestick near her. The lamp came from Mr. and Mrs. Waycross's bedroom upstairs, and so did the candlestick: there were no other lamps or candles downstairs except the lamps waiting to be filled next morning in the back kitchen. But the police thought she would not have come downstairs carrying both the lamp *and* the candle as well.

"She must have brought the lamp, because that was broken. When the murderer took hold of her, they thought, she had dropped the lamp, and it went out; the paraffin spilled, but did not catch fire. Then this man in the tall hat, to finish his work after he had cut her throat, went upstairs, and got a candle, and set fire to the spilled oil. I am stupid at these things; but even I should have guessed that this must mean someone familiar with the house. Also, if she came downstairs, it must have been to let someone in at the front door; and that could not have been a burglar.

"You may be sure all the gossips were like police from the start, even when the police hemm'd and haw'd, because they knew Mrs. Waycross must have opened the door to a man who was not her husband. And immediately they found an indication of this, in the mess that the fire and blood had made in the hall. Some distance away from poor Jane's

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body there was a medicine-bottle, such as chemists use. I think it had been broken in two pieces; and on one intact piece they found sticking some fragments of a letter that had not been quite burned. It was in a man's handwriting, not her husband's, and they made out enough of it to understand. It was full of — expressions of love, you know, and it made an appointment to meet her there on that night."

Rodney Hunter, as the girl paused, felt impelled to ask a question.

"Did they know whose handwriting it was?"

"It was Jeremy Wilkes's," replied the other simply. "Though they never proved that, never more than slightly suspected it, and the circumstances did not bear it out. In fact, a knife stained with blood was actually found in Mr. Wilkes's possession. But the police never brought it to anything, poor souls. For, you see, not Mr. Wilkes — or anyone else in the world — could possibly have done the murder."

"I don't understand that," said Hunter, rather sharply.

"Forgive me if I am stupid about telling things," urged their hostess in a tone of apology. She seemed to be listening to the chimney growl under a cold sky, and listening with hard, placid eyes. "But even the village gossips could tell that. When Mrs. Randall came here to the house on that morning, both the front and the back doors were locked and securely bolted on the inside. All the windows were locked on the inside. If you will look at the fastenings in this dear place, you will know what that means.

"But, bless you, that was the least of it! I told you about the snow. The snowfall had stopped at 9 o'clock in the evening, hours and hours before Mrs. Waycross was murdered. When the police came, there were only two separate sets of footprints in the great unmarked half-acre of snow round the house. One set belonged to Mr. Wilkes, who had come up and looked in through the window the night before. The other belonged to Mrs. Randall. The police could follow and explain both sets of tracks; but there were no other tracks at all, and no one was hiding in the house.

"Of course, it was absurd to suspect Mr. Wilkes. It was not only that he told a perfectly straight story about the man in the tall hat; but both Dr. Sutton and Mr. Pawley, who drove back with him from Five Ashes, were there to swear he could not have done it. You understand, he came no closer to the house than the windows of this room. They could watch every step he made in the moonlight, and they did. Afterwards he drove home with Dr. Sutton, and slept there; or, I should say, they continued their terrible drinking until daylight. It is true that they found in his possession a knife with blood on it, but he ex-

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plained that he had used the knife to gut a rabbit.

"It was the same with poor Mrs. Randall, who had been up all night about her midwife's duties, though naturally it was even more absurd to think of *her*. But there were no other footprints at all, either coming to or going from the house, in all that stretch of snow; and all the ways in or out were locked on the inside."

It was Muriel who spoke then, in a voice that tried to be crisp, but wavered in spite of her. "Are you telling us that all this is true?" she demanded.

"I am teasing you a little, my dear," said the other. "But, really and truly, it all did happen. Perhaps I will show you in a moment."

"I suppose it was really the husband who did it?" asked Muriel in a bored tone.

"Poor Mr. Waycross!" said their hostess tenderly. "He spent that night in a temperance hotel near Charing Cross Station, as he always did, and, of course, he never left it. When he learned about his wife's duplicity" — again Hunter thought she was going to pull down a corner of her eyelid — "it nearly drove him out of his mind, poor fellow. I think he gave up agricultural machinery and took to preaching, but I am not sure. I know he left the district soon afterwards, and before he left he insisted on burning the mattress of their bed. It was a dreadful scandal."

"But in that case," insisted Hunter, "who did kill her? And, if there were no footprints and all the doors were locked, how did the murderer come or go? Finally, if all this happened in February, what does it have to do with people being out of the house on Christmas Eve?"

"Ah, that is the real story. That is what I meant to tell you."

She grew very subdued.

"It must have been very interesting to watch the people alter and grow older, or find queer paths, in the years afterwards. For, of course, nothing did happen as yet. The police presently gave it all up; for decency's sake it was allowed to rest. There was a new pump built in the market square; and the news of the Prince of Wales's going to India in '75 to talk about; and presently a new family came to live at 'Clearlawns,' and began to raise their children. The trees and the rains in summer were just the same, you know. It must have been seven or eight years before anything happened, for Jane Waycross was very patient.

"Several of the people had died in the meantime. Mrs. Randall had, in a fit of quinsy; and so had Dr. Sutton, but that was a great mercy, because he fell by the way when he was going out to perform an amputation with too much of the drink in him. But Mr. Pawley had prospered — and, above all, so had Mr. Wilkes. He had become an even finer figure of a man, they tell me, as he drew near middle age. When he married he gave up all his loose habits. Yes, he married; it was the Tinsley heir-

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ess, Miss Linshaw, whom he had been courting at the time of the murder; and I have heard that poor Jane Waycross, even after *she* was married to Mr. Waycross, used to bite her pillow at night because she was so horribly jealous of Miss Linshaw.

"Mr. Wilkes had always been tall, and now he was finely stout. He always wore frock-coats. Though he had lost most of his hair, his beard was full and curly; he had twinkling black eyes, and twinkling ruddy cheeks, and a bluff voice. All the children ran to him. They say he broke as many feminine hearts as before. At any wholesome entertainment he was always the first to lead the cotillion or applaud the fiddler, and I do not know what hostesses would have done without him.

"On Christmas Eve, then — remember, I am not sure of the date — the Fentons gave a Christmas party. The Fentons were the very nice family who had taken this house afterwards, you know. There was to be no dancing, but all the old games. Naturally, Mr. Wilkes was the first of all to be invited, and the first to accept; for everything was all smoothed away by time, like the wrinkles in last year's counterpane; and what's past *is* past, or so they say. They had decorated the house with holly and mistletoe, and guests began to arrive as early as 2 in the afternoon.

"I had all this from Mrs. Fenton's aunt (one of the Warwickshire Abbotts), who was actually staying here at the time. In spite of such a festal season, the preparations had not been going at all well that day, though such preparations usually did. Miss Abbott complained that there was a nasty earthy smell in the house. It was a dark and raw day, and the chimneys did not seem to draw as well as they should. What is more, Mrs. Fenton cut her finger when she was carving the cold fowl, because she said one of the children had been hiding behind the window-curtains in here, and peeping out at her; she was very angry. But Mr. Fenton, who was going about the house in his carpet slippers before the arrival of the guests, called her 'Mother' and said that it was Christmas.

"It is certainly true that they forgot all about this when the fun of the games began. Such squealings you never heard! — or so I am told. Foremost of all at Bobbing for Apples or Nuts in May was Mr. Jeremy Wilkes. He stood, gravely paternal, in the midst of everything, with his ugly wife beside him, and stroked his beard. He saluted each of the ladies on the cheek under the mistletoe; there was also some scampering to salute him; and, though he *did* remain for longer than was necessary behind the window-curtains with the younger Miss Twigelow, his wife only smiled. There was only one unpleasant incident, soon forgotten. Towards dusk a great gusty wind began to come up, with the chimneys smoking worse than usual. It

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being nearly dark, Mr. Fenton said it was time to fetch in the Snapdragon Bowl, and watch it flame. You know the game? It is a great bowl of lighted spirit, and you must thrust in your hand and pluck out a raisin from the bottom without scorching your fingers. Mr. Fenton carried it in on a tray in the half-darkness; it was flickering with that bluish flame you have seen on Christmas puddings. Miss Abbott said that once, in carrying it, he started and turned round. She said that for a second she thought there was a face looking over his shoulder, and it wasn't a nice face.

"Later in the evening, when the children were sleepy and there was tissue-paper scattered all over the house, the grown-ups began their games in earnest. Someone suggested Blind Man's Bluff. They were mostly using the hall and this room here, as having more space than the dining-room. Various members of the party were blindfolded with the men's handkerchiefs; but there was a dreadful amount of cheating. Mr. Fenton grew quite annoyed about it, because the ladies almost always caught Mr. Wilkes when they could; Mr. Wilkes was laughing and perspiring heartily, and his great cravat with the silver pin had almost come loose.

"To make it certain nobody could cheat, Mr. Fenton got a little white linen bag — like this one. It was the pillow-cover off the baby's cot, really; and he said nobody could look through that if it were tied over the head.

"I should explain that they had been having some trouble with the lamp in this room. Mr. Fenton said: 'Confound it, mother, what is wrong with that lamp? Turn up the wick, will you?' It was really quite a good lamp from Spence and Minstead's, and should not have burned so dull as it did. In the confusion, while Mrs. Fenton was trying to make the light better, and he was looking over his shoulder at her, Mr. Fenton had been rather absently fastening the bag on the head of the last person caught. He has said since that he did not notice who it was. No one else noticed, either, the light being so dim and there being such a large number of people. It seemed to be a girl in a broad bluish kind of dress, standing over near the door.

"Perhaps you know how people act when they have just been blindfolded in this game. First they usually stand very still, as though they were smelling or sensing in which direction to go. Sometimes they make a sudden jump, or sometimes they begin to shuffle gently forward. Everyone noticed what an air of *purpose* there seemed to be about this person whose face was covered; she went forward very slowly, and seemed to crouch down a bit.

"It began to move towards Mr. Wilkes in very short but quick little jerks, the white bag bobbing on its face. At this time Mr. Wilkes was sitting at the end of the table, laugh-

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ing, with his face pink above the beard, and a glass of our Kentish cider in his hand. I want you to imagine this room as being very dim, and much more cluttered, what with all the tassels they had on the furniture then; and the high-piled hair of the ladies, too. The hooded person got to the edge of the table. It began to edge along towards Mr. Wilkes's chair; and then it jumped.

"Mr. Wilkes got up and skipped (yes, skipped) out of its way, laughing. It waited quietly, after which it went, in the same slow way, towards him again. It nearly got him again, by the edge of the potted plant. All this time it did not say anything, you understand, although everyone was applauding it and crying encouraging advice. It kept its head down. Miss Abbott says she began to notice an unpleasant faint smell of burnt cloth or something worse, which turned her half-ill. By the time the hooded person came stooping clear across the room, as certainly as though it could see him, Mr. Wilkes was not laughing any longer.

"In the corner by one bookcase, he said out loud: 'I'm tired of this silly, rotten game; go away, do you hear?' Nobody there had ever heard him speak like that, in such a loud, wild way, but they laughed and thought it must be the Kentish cider. 'Go away!' cried Mr. Wilkes again, and began to strike at it with his fist. All this time, Miss Abbott says, she had observed his face gradually changing. He dodged again, very pleasant and nimble for such a big man, but with the perspiration running down his face. Back across the room he went again, with it following him; and he cried out something that most naturally shocked them all inexpressibly.

"He screamed out: 'For God's sake, Fenton, take it off me!'

"And for the last time the thing jumped.

"They were over near the curtains of that bay window, which were drawn as they are now. Miss Twigelow, who was nearest, says that Mr. Wilkes could not have seen anything, because the white bag was still drawn over the woman's head. The only thing she noticed was that at the lower part of the bag, where the face must have been, there was a curious kind of discoloration, a stain of some sort which had not been there before: something seemed to be seeping through. Mr. Wilkes fell back between the curtains, with the hooded person after him, and screamed again. There was a kind of thrashing noise in or behind the curtains; then they fell straight again, and everything grew quiet.

"Now, our Kentish cider is very strong, and for a moment Mr. Fenton did not know what to think. He tried to laugh at it, but the laugh did not sound well. Then he went over to the curtains, calling out gruffly to them to come out of there and not play the fool. But, after he had looked inside the curtains, he turned round very sharply and asked

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the rector to get the ladies out of the room. This was done, but Miss Abbott often said that she had one quick peep inside. Though the bay windows were locked on the inside, Mr. Wilkes was now alone on the window seat. She could see his beard sticking up, and the blood. He was dead, of course. But, since he had murdered Jane Waycross, I sincerely think that he deserved to die."

For several seconds the two listeners did not move. She had all too successfully conjured up this room in the late 'seventies, whose stuffiness still seemed to pervade it now.

"But look here!" protested Hunter, when he could fight down an inclination to get out of the room quickly. "You say he killed her after all? And yet you told us he had an absolute alibi. You said he never went closer to the house than the windows. . . ."

"No more he did, my dear," said the other.

"He was courting the Linshaw heiress at the time," she resumed; "and Miss Linshaw was a very proper young lady who would have been horrified if she had heard about him and Jane Waycross. She would have broken off the match, naturally. But poor Jane Waycross meant her to hear. She was much in love with Mr. Wilkes, and she was going to tell the whole matter publicly: Mr. Wilkes had been trying to persuade her not to do so."

"But —"

"Oh, don't you see what happened?" cried the other in a pettish tone. "It is so dreadfully simple. I am not clever at these things, but I should have seen it in a moment: even if I did not already know. I told you everything so that you should be able to guess.

"When Mr. Wilkes and Dr. Sutton and Mr. Pawley drove past here in the gig that night, they saw a bright light burning in the windows of this room. I told you that. But the police never wondered, as anyone should, what caused that light. Jane Waycross never came into this room, as you know; she was out in the hall, carrying either a lamp or a candle. But that lamp in the thick blue-silk shade, held out there in the hall, would not have caused a bright light to shine through this room and illuminate it. Neither would a tiny candle; it is absurd. And I told you there were no other lamps in the house except some empty ones waiting to be filled in the back kitchen. There is only one thing they could have seen. They saw the great blaze of the paraffin oil round Jane Waycross's body.

"Didn't I tell you it was dreadfully simple? Poor Jane was upstairs waiting for her lover. From the upstairs window she saw Mr. Wilkes's gig, with the fine yellow wheels, drive along the road in the moonlight, and she did not know there were other men in it; she thought he was alone. She came downstairs —

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lice did not think more about that broken medicine-bottle lying in the hall, the large bottle that was broken in just two long pieces. She must have had a use for it; and, of course, she had. You knew that the oil in the lamp was almost exhausted, although there was a great blaze round the body. When poor Jane came downstairs, she was carrying the unlighted lamp in one hand; in the other hand she was carrying a lighted candle, and an old medicine-bottle containing paraffin oil. When she got downstairs, she meant to fill the lamp from the medicine-bottle, and then light it with the candle.

"But she was too eager to get downstairs, I am afraid. When she was more than half-way down, hurrying, that long nightgown tripped her. She pitched forward down the stairs on her face. The medicine-bottle broke on the tiles under her, and poured a lake of paraffin round her body. Of course, the lighted candle set the paraffin blazing when it fell; but that was not all. One intact side of that broken bottle, long and sharp and cleaner than any blade, cut into her throat when she fell on the smashed bottle. She was not quite stunned by the fall. When she felt herself burning, and the blood almost as hot, she tried to save herself. She tried to crawl forward on her hands, forward into the hall, away from the blood and oil and fire.

"That was what Mr. Wilkes really saw when he looked in the window.

"You see, he had been unable to get rid of the two fuddled friends, who insisted on clinging to him and drinking with him. He had been obliged to drive them home. If he could not go to 'Clearlawns' now, he wondered how at least he could leave a message; and the light in the window gave him an excuse.

"He saw pretty Jane propped up on her hands in the hall, looking out at him beseechingly while the blue flame ran up and turned yellow. You might have thought he would have pitied, for she loved him very much. Her wound was not really a deep wound. If he had broken into the house at that moment, he might have saved her life. But he preferred to let her die: because now she would make no public scandal and spoil his chances with the rich Miss Linshaw. That was why he returned to his friends and told a lie about a murderer in a tall hat. It is why, in heaven's truth, he murdered her himself. But when he returned to his friends, I do not wonder that they saw him mopping his forehead. You know now how Jane Waycross came back for him, presently."

There was another heavy silence.

The girl got to her feet, with a sort of bouncing motion which was as suggestive as it was vaguely familiar. It was as though she were about to run. She stood there, a trifle crouched, in her prim brown dress, so oddly narrow at the waist after an old-fashioned pattern; and in the play of light on her face Rodney

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Hunter fancied that its prettiness was only a shell.

"The same thing happened afterwards, on some Christmas Eves," she explained. "They played Blind Man's Bluff over again. That is why people who live here do not care to risk it nowadays. It happens at a quarter-past 7 —"

Hunter stared at the curtains. "But it was a quarter-past 7 when we got here!" he said. "It must now be —"

"Oh, yes," said the girl, and her eyes brimmed over. "You see, I told you you had nothing to fear; it was all over then. But that is not why I thank you. I begged you to stay, and you did. You have listened to me, as no one else would. And now I have told it at last, and now I think both of us can sleep."

Not a fold stirred or altered in the dark curtains that closed the window bay; yet, as though a blurred lens had come into focus, they now seemed innocent and devoid of harm. You could have put a Christmas-tree there. Rodney Hunter, with Muriel following his gaze, walked across and threw back the curtains. He saw a quiet window-seat covered with chintz, and the rising moon beyond the window. When he turned round, the girl in the old-fashioned dress was not there. But the front doors were open again, for he could feel a current of air blowing through the house.

With his arm round Muriel, who was white-faced, he went out into the hall. They did not look long at the scorched and beaded stains at the foot of the panelling, for even the scars of fire seemed gentle now. Instead, they stood in the doorway looking out, while the house threw its great blaze of light across the frosty Weald. It was a welcoming light. Over the rise of a hill, black dots trudging in the frost showed that Jack Bannister's party was returning; and they could hear the sound of voices carrying far. They heard one of the party carelessly singing a Christmas carol for glory and joy, and the laughter of children coming home.

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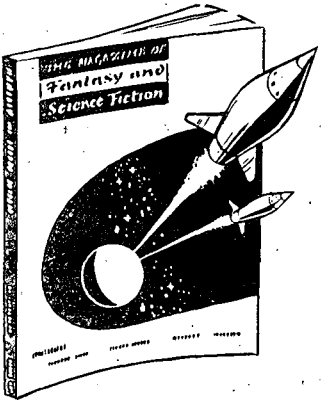

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